

Kin Strife

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Acknowledgements

Dreaming stories was one way I enjoyed my early years. For years, I wanted to write some. I once had a novel started, although, I never finished and lost the story decade ago.

A tremendous thank you to all who offer help that often you never see the results of. Years later, even decades later, those you help, will remember the assistance you gave.

May this novel assist others on their search for hope and acceptance in world often not designed for them.

Chapter 1

A plain manila envelope from Arizona. Certified mail. Unusual.

No one Terra knew lived in Arizona. Museums and universities from the region sometimes requested pieces from her collection. Those requests were normally initiated by email.

Perhaps one of her colleagues had moved there while she had been gone on her last exploration trip to a little known village in South America.

After a scramble, she found rarely used letter opener hidden on her cluttered desk.

A single folded sheet of paper fluttered to her lap.

Someone spent a lot of time designing this stationary. A sun, an arrow, and a dream catcher covered the top. Rock and stone pictures cascaded down the sides. Cactus stretched arms up to desert birds. In the bottom right hand corner, a rocky trail meandered to a pueblo house.

"Dear Terra,

I have read many of your articles, and one of your books on the surviving ancient cultures around the world. My village is a mixture of such American cultures. The rest of my village have no interest, or time, to devote to the task I dream of. That dream is that stories are shared with the world before we are gone. We are a tiny village located in Arizona. You are welcome to stay for the winter.

Keama

The elder

Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx."

Terra stared at the paper.

The downstairs door to the apartment building opened and slammed shut. A cold draft slipped up the stairs and under her door.

Terra shivered in Boston's early November chill.

At least there, I will be around other people. Maybe people who feel as displaced as I do.

She picked up her phone, and called her one friend. "Janet, I have an assignment to be gone for six months. Would your daughter like the apartment while I'm gone?"

"You returned from South America last week!" Pans banged in the background.

"It was a wonderful trip. I have almost all my new collection labeled now. I'm ready for my next assignment. My editor is ready for me to be gone too." Terra touched the table beside the bone flute that was rumored to be older than Boston. A few more pictures to touch up, the write up for the editor, and the last trip would be complete. Time for a new journey.

"My daughter might as well stay there permanently. I think most of her stuff is there anyway."

"Her hours are so different from mine."

Janet laughed. "You wake up as she falls asleep. It should work out good. Come for dinner tonight and tell us all about your trip."

"I will. I'll try not to bore you. After I finish this deadline." Her fingers traced the jaguar etching on the museum quality specimen.

"You've likely a week to complete an hour's work, if I know you. Keep us informed. We miss you."

"I'll call if I come home for a weekend. Have her email me if her boyfriend decides to stay."

"Why don't you put her name on the lease?"

"I might consider that. Probably safer for insurance purposes."

A week of preparations passed.

Carefully packed artifact collections, gathered from the four corners of the Earth, filled labeled shipping containers along one wall. This time, she didn't really want to leave them alone in the apartment.

Something about this trip was different. Preparations took longer than usual. The editor called and emailed about changing nearly every important point in the articles from the last trip. Her collection boxes nagged at her. The people who had handed her each piece thought she would personally use them. They didn't belong packed away.

Bostonians should see and learn from the artifacts themselves, and not be expected to find articles written long ago. They'd never know the articles existed, if the artifacts weren't easy to locate.

Taking them on a plane was out of the question. Too many to take. And nowhere to store them where she was going. Plus, the village elder, Keama might be offended. Either from the artifacts from so many other cultures, or the fact that they were boxed up, not being used by a person.

Going to the museum was out of the question. Too many children running around at this time of year to have time to speak to a curator, and carry on an adult conversation about the cultural significance and value of each piece.

Janet and her daughter could do that task as well as she could. Perhaps better, as they enjoyed talking to people. Strangers enjoyed talking to them as well.

She sent the boxes to the temperature controlled storage unit until Janet could take care of them. They'd be safe from the cold and mildew there, if not from fire and bugs.

Terra arrived at the airport extra early. Arriving early usually meant peace and quiet to read. Not today.

A woman not much younger than Terra struggled with holding the hand of a toddler and an infant in a stroller. Both children cried.

It was going to be a long hour in the crowded waiting room. The crying children settled down for a nap.

The overhead speaker blared their flight, instantly waking them.

Terra stood up. The other passengers ignored the woman and children. She gritted her teeth at the grating sound of the baby crying.

"I'm sorry," the mother said. "This is our first trip. I don't know what to do."

Another passenger walked over to help her. On the walk to plane, other passengers offered suggestions, and even toys for the children to play with.

The woman settled herself and the two little ones directly in front of Terra's seat. The toddler snuggled a bear another passenger had handed her. She bounced it along the back of the seat, almost in Terra's face.

At least I have earplugs. Terra tried to read and relax.

The toddler bounced off the seat, down the aisles, under and over the seats, trying to play peek-a-boo with her. She settled down again, barely in time for landing.

As they stood up to exit, the little girl reached for Terra's hand while her mother carried the sleeping infant.

The mother smiled.

Terra wanted to run. Fast.

"Looks like you made a friend." A stranger blocked the walkway. Not a total stranger. She had seen him before on other flights. They had never spoken.

"Helping a young mother. Then I'm off on assignment."

"Good luck with your assignment." He walked the opposite way down the terminal.

The little girl pulled away; and hopefully ran to her mother.

Terra stood. Unsure whether to follow the child, or the man.

A long ragged line waited for rental cars. Families with small children struggled to maintain order.

Terra hung back until all the families were gone, or so she thought. As she reached the counter, she was dashed nearly to the ground.

The same toddler fell to the ground beside her and cried. Her mother, looking more haggard than before, cradled her infant nearby.

"I'm sorry. She keeps finding you. I was afraid all the cars would be gone. It took us too long to clean up."

The lady at the counter looked at the woman. "Plenty are available. You may have to walk a ways. Or for a tip, a driver can bring it up here."

The toddler stopped crying and stood up. "Sorry. You okay? Hurt my knee."

The knee was red. No damage. "Does your mom kiss your boo-boos and make them go away?"

"No, does yours?"

"I don't remember." In fact, she had no real memory of her mother.

The little girl stared big eyed at her.

The mother finished her transaction and looked at the little girl's knee. "Sweetie, please be more careful. You might hurt yourself, or someone else, and what would we do then?" She walked off with the children.

Terra closed her eyes. Peace finally.

"I hope the mother is only distracted today." The woman at the counter tapped a pencil.

"Must be. No idea how long I will need my rental. I'll be here six months."

"We only rent two weeks at a time. There is a long-term rental place downtown if you want to exchange it for one of those within two weeks, or sooner."

"Thank you."

With the keys in hand, she went in search of the car. Row, column, space. The rental parking lot was little more than a fancy, giant spreadsheet. At least a mostly quiet one.

Chapter 2

Terra exited the airport terminal in Phoenix for the three-hour drive. Warm sunshine beamed through the orange rental car's deeply tinted windshield. Boston's icy chill crept out of her chest. Fingers thawed on the steering wheel. A hole in the floorboard allowed engine heat to flow across her toes.

Driving was perfect thinking time. Always leaving something behind. Always looking for greener pastures. Searching for home. Chasing her own shadowy dreams. As with all shadows, they were always a finger width out of reach. Maybe this time would be different. She could learn their native languages so much faster when they had a common language.

The beauty of the apparent barren landscape mesmerized her. The empty road ribboned many miles from the city. Hopefully I won't be lost out here. The temperatures are so warm for November.

The entrance to the reservation was marked with a broken down wooden fence. Barbed wire strung from posts into the ground, and back up through a cactus. One of those that took hundreds of years to grow, and the barbed wire grew right through the middle of the base. A scar straight up the base marked the cactus growth around the long forgotten fence.

One small adobe home set apart from two groups of homes clustered together, as if for comfort. She pulled into the drive, marked only by small stones.

An ancient looking woman appeared in the doorway. She wavered in the breeze. The warm air didn't lift the deerskin skirt, or bring a smile to the woman's face.

Terra stepped out of the colorful car. The only spot of color she could see in the grey and beige wilderness.

"Good afternoon Terra." The woman's mouth barely moved as she spoke.

"Hello. You must be Keama." She stepped closer, trying to guess what the woman expected her to say or do. The customs this village expected in the presence of the village elder would be different than any other village she had visited.

"Welcome to our village. A place has been prepared for you. Would you join me for tea?" Keama turned back into the home without waiting for an answer.

Terra followed into an open room with a kitchen area in one corner. A small bed filled one wall with a long table by its side. Another wall was covered in books and dried vegetation.

"I use the bed for my chair, as well as to sleep. With so little room it makes no sense to have extra chairs for the table. Sit, sit, don't be afraid," Keama carried the teapot and cups to the table.

"It seems disrespectful to sit on another person's sleeping place." Terra peered at the one room home.

"Anywhere you sit has once been slept on, lived on, died on, and even given birth on. No place is better than another. Some are more comfortable." Keama sat a small wooden tray of unusual looking bread on the table.

They settled down side by side on the bed to eat and drink. The older woman handed her a plate for her bread, and cup for tea.

The door opened. A small girl carrying a bundle almost as large as herself slipped inside.

"Morning Keama. Little Rock, and I are here. Mama's nurse is with her."

"Welcome, little one. Lay your brother on the bed behind us. Select a cup, and join us." Keama's eyes sparkled.

The child tucked her brother into the covers between two pillows. She clattered the dishes as she grabbed a plate and cup. The girl crawled across Terra's lap to the empty space between her and Keama.

Terra gasped.

The girl glanced at her and reached for the bread.

Keama poured her some tea.

Several silent moments passed as the three enjoyed their tea and bread. Terra looked at each piece as she ate it, trying to guess what foods were added to the simple mixture. "What goodies do you bake into this bread?"

The young girl looked up at Keama.

The village elder nodded at her.

"Corn for health, beans for strength, and meat for prosperity. I think some of these have rabbit, and some have something else. If it's snake, I don't want to know." The girl took a bite and closed her eyes. She licked the grease off her lips.

"What is prosperity for you?" Keama looked at Terra.

"I haven't really thought about it. Whatever it is, I haven't found it." Her trip today, and all the places she had been swirled in her mind. So many had felt almost like home. Almost. Never quite the home she searched for.

Keama sipped her tea and glanced around the simple room holding four people. The room was small, and it would be difficult for four to live here.

In one village Terra had visited, as many as eight adults had shared a home not much larger. There, the bodies added needed warmth during the winter months. Here, it might be the same at night.

The little girl finished her last bite. She looked up at Terra. "I have had it, and will lose it soon. Please come hear my mother's stories soon." The girl jumped up. She

grabbed her sleeping brother. Ran out the door, and clattered down the steps.

Not quick enough. A tear glistened as it rolled down her pale cheek.

Terra slid back to stand. She should check on the child. If she could find her. If the girl tripped and fell on the baby, it would be squashed.

A hand landed gently on her shoulder. "She'll be back. Perhaps I should tell you her story. Have some more tea."

After a few long minutes of silence, Keama began again. "Her name is Amanda Dianna. A sweet child of four. Who is almost mother to her brother, that almost wasn't."

It didn't make any sense. Village elders often spoke in riddles. Terra usually solved them, though it could take time.

"Her father died minutes before he would have found out his son was to be born. She and her mother saw him die. Hit by a speeding car, while crossing a street to meet them for lunch."

Another pause.

How could that happen? The little girl, who would have then been three must have had a terrible time, and still bare the pain and mental scars. This must have occurred somewhere other than the reservation. No car had been seen or heard since she arrived.

"A few weeks later, her mother was diagnosed with a rare medical condition. Her life could be saved. Treatment would kill her unborn child."

Feelings she didn't recognize by name fluttered though her mind. "What did she have wrong with her?"

"Multiple types of cancer. And the doctors didn't expect her to live to see the baby born, if she refused treatment."

Another pause.

Nothing Terra could say would speed the time it took for the woman to tell the story.

"Gina came here to live, and was adopted by our tribe. Her mother's ancestors are related to our ancestors. We wanted her children to have a home."

"There are no other family members that Gina could turn to?"

"None closer than us."

Another pause.

"Four weeks ago, Little Rock was born."

Keama looked far away, out the door, without seeing it. "I seek to have Gina's stories, as well as our own, told."

Keama glanced toward Terra. "We search to find an adoptive mother for these two special children." She turned the teapot on the table.

Gina's stories, and those like them, could easily bring adoptive parents out of the woodwork. Perhaps even Janet, or her daughter, would take the children. Except, if the tribe had adopted them, they couldn't be adopted out of the tribe.

"Will you help us find her?"

Terra turned away from the village elder to the wall of herbs and books. So many plants saved and stored. So much knowledge and lore right here, and likely more inside Keama's memory. Far more than she could ever record in many lifetimes. Many of the plants, and even a few of the books, Terra recognized. Too many, she did not. "I can attempt to record the stories. What more can I do?"

Keama stood slowly. She toddled to the distant wall. A piece of dried vegetation draped across her palm. The woman reached to the roof and tugged it from a crevice. "This plant fiber is much like our nation. Much like Gina. It is all dried up. Bitter. Scared. If I crush it between my

fingers, it will turn to dust. However, if I take more plant fibers and bind them together, I can make a basket, or mat, that is nearly indestructible by natural methods, and will last a long time."

Terra was silent. More riddles, those easily recognizable to her, though perhaps less so to others.

"Come, Storysaver, it is time to walk to your cabin. Don't worry about the dishes."

They walked by her rented car. "Should I move my car now, or later?"

"Later. First we will stop to see the young mother. Then on to the home you will share with two women and a girl."

They walked past the first set of cabins. Five crowded in a small circle. In between them, a bare dirt play area echoed with noisy young children and dogs. They chased each other among the houses where doors swung open. Two of the doors barely hung on their hinges.

The second cluster only contained four homes and they appeared neater, less dirty. Only a few children played here, both younger and older than the previous group, and much more subdued.

Keama knocked at the last door.

Amanda Dianna answered. "Come in. Momma is resting."

This home was quite similar to Keama's. Instead of dried vegetation, it had a second small bed on the opposite wall. Keama walked to the bed behind the table.

"I have brought the Storysaver. We will move the table." Keama picked up one end and looked at Terra, who rushed over to take the other end. They set the table out of the way, and then lifted the surprisingly light extra bed frame to carry over as a seat beside the resting woman.

Gina looked at her warmly. Pain pinched her pale face. "Hello. I don't have many stories left to tell. My daughter has many more than I do."

Terra didn't have anything to record with. She would have to remember everything from this first visit. "Would you like to tell me the story of your children's names?"

"Amanda Dianna is the name I wished for my daughter. It is a name of strength and hope."

Her ragged breath became less audible. "As for my son, who was not meant to be. His isn't even really a name. A nickname that can be changed."

Amanda Dianna held a cup with a straw for Gina.

"With my daughter, I would know her. For my son, his adoptive mother should name him. After all, she will raise him." Gina slipped into sleep. The light weight cover barely lifted from the woman's breath.

Too quiet. Keama was not beside her. Nor was Amanda Dianna. Even the infant boy had disappeared.

She reached for the wrist on the coverlet to check for a pulse. Satisfied there was one, though weak, Terra stepped outside to find Keama.

"She is resting."

Keama sat on a step beside the home.

Amanda Dianna and her brother sat on the ground in the shade from Keama's body.

"It doesn't take long for her medications to work. We will come back later." Keama slowly lifted herself up with the handrail. After a few breaths, she hobbled off behind the homes.

Chapter 3

Terra followed, expecting Amanda Dianna to stay with her brother and mother.

Amanda Dianna touched her arm. The girl handed the bundled baby to her. She swung her arms as they followed Keama.

Terra cradled the baby in both arms, so tightly he squeaked. She loosened her hold a tiny bit. It was like trying to adjust a wiggling, fussing sack of flour. Best to pretend that was what she was doing. Like that class Janet's daughter had taken about raising babies in high school. Except, if this baby were dropped, she'd be guilty of murder. She clutched him tighter to her chest.

He fussed because he couldn't move his arms or legs. The four-week old boy kicked and wiggled until he was closer to laying down, rather than standing against her chest.

Amanda Dianna walked close beside her on the narrow path. She'd reach up and tap her brother's toes from time to time when they dangled out of the blanket.

The infant weighed too much for either the child, or Keama, to carry far. A dribble soaked her shirt. Terra pushed him away from her body, at a distance. This way, she could look at him, and keep his undiapered odor off her body.

Bare ground stretched as far as she could see. Little more than desert sand and dirt, even beyond the homes. A tiny path snaked into the distance. Living creatures stirred around them. Mostly insects, and a few tiny mice peeked out in the broad daylight.

They circled around a few boulders, stacked almost as if on purpose in a gate like fashion.

Keama stopped at a small pool of water. The only gnarled tree around grew out of the pool.

"This pool is an underground spring, protected by the wading tree. As long as its roots protect the water, the water will be safe and pure, rarely bothered by such things as mosquitoes. This is where we collect our water. Carry what you can each day. It will bring you strength. There are about thirty people who drink from this spring."

The spring looked no bigger than a small horse trough. Somehow, water to cook, drink, and clean was gathered here for thirty people, even if it didn't look big enough for one person's daily needs.

Keama disappeared over the ridge beyond the spring and wading tree.

The added weight of the baby, slowed Terra down more than age slowed down Keama. She found her a few hundred yards away at a small stream that also seemed to appear out of the rocks, and disappear back into the desert floor after a few hundred feet.

"Here we wash our clothes. This water isn't good to drink. It can be used for baths. During the rains, we have plenty. During dry spells, little water. Hand me the baby."

Terra was reluctant to give him up. Keama looked too weak to hold the wiggly infant. Not realizing it, she actually drew the baby closer.

Something flickered across Keama's face as she reached behind a rock for a small metal tub. "Let me hold the baby. Take this container, and fill it four times into this tub."

After she filled the tub, Keama handed the now unclothed child to her. "Now bathe him."

The water would make the baby too slippery to hold. He'd hit his head. At other villages, she had never touched an infant. She had watched women bathe them

laying on the stream bottom with their tiny heads sticking out of the water. It shouldn't be too hard, for the experienced. At least a stream bed was soft. Not like the hard metal tub.

Amanda Dianna stepped up. "Keama you're scaring her. I'll hold his hands while you clean him. I can catch him if he starts to fall."

Terra took a deep breath and washed the boy.

Amanda Dianna let go so he could be thoroughly cleaned underneath.

Terra had done most of the work herself. She was proud of that moment, as she had certainly rarely held a baby before, and never washed one. The baby had not cried either. In fact, she was beginning to wonder if he was okay. Most American babies cried anytime they saw her. This baby reminded her of other babies she had seen, in villages much like this one. Quiet, and raising their hands in her face if she came too close.

Amanda Dianna took the infant to dress him.

Terra dumped the tub beyond the place where the water disappeared into the ground. She took the infant back without being asked. Surprised by the almost natural feeling of having a baby in her arms.

Keama walked back to the village.

They reentered the home of the dying woman and sat together on the small bed. Amanda Dianna sat on a stool by the foot of the larger bed.

A small, warm breeze whispered through the open door. As it touched the baby, he looked up at Terra and smiled, with a tiny infant giggle. The breeze traveled on to pause gently over Gina's warm forehead. It interrupted her dreams as it caressed her, and wound its way back out the room. A small cloud of dust followed the breeze.

Amanda Dianna grabbed a damp cloth for her mother's head, and glanced thoughtfully at Keama. "Daddy comes more often now. The visits seem almost as a final goodbye to me, and a welcome home to momma."

That comment crossed into Terra's memory. Birth, death, and spiritual beliefs had always been an important part of her research in village life. This time, it touched a place in her heart she didn't know existed.

Little Rock grabbed at dust floating in the air above the bed. His hand grabbed hers, and pulled it into his mouth. He gummed her fingers.

Amanda Diana brought his bottle to him. She adjusted him in the basket so she could feed him with one hand. With the other she wiped her mother's warm forehead.

Keama touched the young girl's hand. "You work too hard for one so young. You must find your new mother soon, so your birth mother can rest. Only then will your daddy be at peace."

Amanda Dianna glanced at Terra. She turned back to Keama. "Can you be my chosen mother? Even you know you don't have many summers left. Maybe we have found the one chosen for us."

Terra glanced up from playing with the baby. Two serious faces looked towards her. "What's wrong? Is she sicker?"

Three people laughed.

Gina glanced in her direction as well. "The children need a mother. My daughter can't go to school if she plays nurse to me; and mother to her brother. Will you stay here, and help her? Let her teach you the simple ways of life."

Terra was only here for a visit. She had spent many years traveling to various other villages. They would soon

change their minds. She could live the simple life, and enjoyed it. Even if something unknown was missing.

The women in the room spanned the age charts. Keama the elder, Amanda Dianna the child, and Gina, her own age, who should have died long ago. The place, and life, seemed so simple, and so rewarding. She felt comfortable here, with these people, at this moment. It wouldn't all be sunshine. Now, she felt more peace than ever before in her life.

"It won't always be easy. Some people here who didn't want me to be adopted. They knew I wouldn't be around long." Gina paused for a sip of water.

"There are some who think my children shouldn't be here; that they don't belong. You will have to prove you fit in." She drifted into a medicinal induced haze.

"You have something to share, as well as something to take. There are people here who will consider sharing as if you didn't believe they could do it on their own. Stay, and see my family pulled back together into the strand of life."

Keama full of life appeared frail on the surface. Gina who should be full of life was frail. Amanda Dianna, the girl, carried an enormous burden for so small a set of shoulders.

Terra didn't have a choice.

That was the wrong answer.

She had to make the choice. How many had come before her, and failed? No one would tell her. Not now, and maybe not ever.

"I'll stay. Where would I sleep here? There isn't quite room for another bed, and Little Rock really needs his own bed, as I don't see one for him."

Amanda Dianna laughed. "Oh, he sleeps in his basket for now. Most babies here do for six months. It's good for

their health to keep them from wiggling too much. As for a bed, one can be made in an hour, and mine can be stored under yours. Mine can be in the cooking area at night."

"Such a simple life I may enjoy, though if I am to save stories, I will need to record them on my computer. Is there enough room here for me to work?" The answer was in her heart. She needed time, not room to record stories.

"Shall we let Little Rock take his nap, while we go make the new bed?"

Keama took Little Rock's bottle. "You and Amanda Dianna go. I'll feed him, and rock him to sleep."

Terra handed him gently to Keama.

The elder caressed his forehead. He would soon be settled.

Bed building hadn't been difficult at all. Finding enough broken branches in the community woodpile was the most difficult part. Children watched them as they sorted. No one spoke to her, only to Amanda Diana.

The main part of the bed was actually made of pre-braided mat sewed around the four-pole frame, which rested on four thin limbs. Almost too thin. One frowning woman had brought out the mat and handed it to Amanda Diana without glancing at Terra.

The neighbors hadn't helped. Nor had they hindered. Watchful and quiet, even the noisy children and barking dogs had disappeared.

Amanda Dianna knew everyone, and where everything was. People flocked to her, as did the dogs in the village.

They tilted the tiny cot to bring it through the door.

There were things she could not do for herself, or her mother and brother. Cooking was one of these. Terra looked around the bleak kitchen in dismay at the lack of food. A counter, and a sink with a plug under to pour out

the dirty dishwater. The cabinet only held a few dishes, with no food in sight.

"Where is the food kept? Am I missing something in these tiny homes?"

Gina smiled and tried to sit up. "Built to ancient standards, these homes all have hidden basement cellars. Not much really, some cannot go deep due to bedrock. Ours is nice."

Amanda Dianna moved a small table beside the bed. "Here is the entrance. We don't have as much as some people."

Terra stepped down into the small cellar. Enough room to squat down and have her head below the floor. She was surrounded by shelves, floor to the low ceiling. Not much was there, mostly dust. In one corner were a few potatoes. In another a piece of jerky. There was even some green stuff, maybe spinach, on the ground.

She stood up, only her legs below the level of the floor. "You don't have much here. Where does your food come from?"

"We don't shop. There isn't a store for twenty miles," Gina said.

"Our neighbors take turns fixing a big meal, and bring us leftovers," Amanda Dianna said.

"Surely, they don't expect me, as a healthy woman to sit and take handouts, when I am here to live with, and help the three of you? Not that I am ashamed. I would gladly try anything they make. I would feel guilty if I didn't do my part."

A cackle at the door startled her.

How could she forget the door and windows were open?

Keama stood at the door with a small basket.

"Tonight's family brought the food for all of us to my

house, since they didn't know where our visitor would be. Come, prepare the table. We can all eat together."

The dinner consisted of similar bread and bean cakes with a side dish of squash and a thin rabbit stew.

"Will you be happy with the food here?" Keama asked.

"I can adjust. I always do wherever I go."

"Do you usually take your favorite food with you?"

Terra had to really think about that. What were her favorite foods? She didn't know anymore. Whatever was available and sounded good. "Sometimes. Can openers were a novelty in some places I've been."

"I think you will find your payment for story saving to be quite to your liking then. Don't expect much. Enough to feed this small family."

"I won't expect much. Is there any money though?"

Keama and Gina both stared at her.

She hadn't said what she meant. "Amanda Dianna's clothes are almost too small already. And Little Rock will grow so fast, he will constantly need new clothes. This may be Arizona. It isn't Africa."

Amanda Dianna laughed so hard the squash in her mouth went flying into her brother's open mouth. "We all share in the community. When I outgrow these, they will pass to the next youngest child."

Gina looked up at Terra. "They do eventually wear out. Worry not. Our community gets deliveries from a store far away." She stopped to breathe and swallow some water. "They prepare a list, email it in, and the deliveries arrive all at once. It's like Christmas, a couple of times a year."

"We try to encourage the ancestral ways here. Even if you decide to order and prepare meals you know for you and your family, don't share with others." Keama settled the empty bowls back into her basket. "Some have no money to buy extras. Others wish it not."

Keama stood to leave.

Terra realized she didn't know where to begin beyond the home she was in. "Where do I start gathering stories?"

"Wait a few days. Greet your neighbors. Know them by name. They will invite you as they are comfortable." Keama turned and slowly toddled out the door.

Terra watched. A slight panic at the enormity of the task she had taken on blurred her vision.

Terra took a few days to adjust to the new routines. Carrying water she had done many times before; and had helped cook ethnic dishes in the cultures she had studied. However, she had always been an outsider looking in. When she began this journey, she expected more of the same. She kept her distance from the neighbors, feeling there were many things, important secrets the people neglected to tell her. Always before, it had been their often limited English, that made communication difficult. Gina's home was the only house in the village with electricity, due to her medical fragility. Others owned, or shared generators for cooking. The hum of the generators an hour before meals awoke the sleeping desert creatures. Otherwise, no electrical hum disturbed the peace. Only the voices inside crowded village homes, left open for the air to circulate.

In many ways, this village had more comforts of home than most she had visited. Although, Janet wouldn't think so. No television, air conditioner, fridge, or cars. Even with these comforts, something was missing. The air tinged with energy that didn't match the sparse beauty of the desert.

Without realizing it, everyday Terra grew a little stronger. Gina grew a little weaker. An unusual brightness in Gina's eyes worried her. She wakened each day, and

used every ounce of energy to share some little story of hope and life with Terra.

Over the next few weeks, she grew to know the children, and the woman she lived with well. She saved many stories to her computer. The neighbors were not shy when telling the stories she was there to collect. They didn't seem to trust her. She couldn't explain how she knew. Though she understood, it had always been that way at every village.

Almost two weeks after her arrival, Gina was too weak to swallow the broth Terra attempted to feed her.

"What would you like me to do?" Terra asked. "I can go find Keama."

Gina smiled.

"Do you want a medical doctor?"

She frowned.

Terra was too concerned to leave her, even long enough to fetch Keama. She dropped the bowl, and hurried to the door.

Amanda Dianna played nearby with a few other children.

"Go for Keama!"

There was a flurry of feet. All the children ran out of the circle.

Keama arrived, already hurrying between the houses.

Terra, Keama, and Amanda Dianna rushed back into the house to stand beside Gina.

Gina reached to her daughter. "Time."

Amanda Dianna nodded, and looked to Terra. "Will you please be my chosen mother, my Maja?"

Terra was surprised and flattered. "I am helping. I don't think that decision should be made while your birth mother is alive."

Keama spoke softly. "It is time to make the decision. Gina and her daughter have chosen you. If you choose, she can now rest in peace, knowing her children will have a good home and a good mother. She doesn't want to suffer anymore. Gina wanted to know their new mother."

Emotions raced through her head. How can I be a good mother? They won't have a father with me. They won't have. Her thoughts trailed down many paths over what seemed hours. They will have someone they know and trust. They will have someone who is as displaced as they are. They will have someone who will look out for their every need, and fight for them.

Tears dripped from Terra's eyes. She reached for Gina's hand. Her other hand held Amanda Dianna's hand. "I will do my best to be a mother to them. For you, for their father, and for me."

The words were said.

The whole village crowded into the room.

"You will raise our children well." Gina smiled her last great smile, as she viewed the home of the ancestors from Earth one last time.

Chapter 4

Afternoon sun glinted through the doorway onto Terra's computer. Worn notes scattered across the table. One story had been incomplete when Gina died. It would remain so in her submission. A click of the button, and the final draft forwarded to her editor.

Her cell phone rang. It was Janet's number. Terra grabbed it, hoping the children slept though the disturbance. "Hello?"

"Hi Terra. How are you?"

Terra walked outside to sit on the steps. She was near enough to hear the children if they woke up. Far away enough for them to sleep. "I'm okay. I have decided to stay here for now. Your daughter can have the apartment."

"Are you sure? You are missed."

"Yes. I am needed here. I feel at home here."

"That's new. Don't forget to call. Maybe we can come out on vacation sometime."

"Visit soon. You won't like it the way I do. A short vacation without worries. Oh, and the sun tan too."

"I'll tell my daughter. Keep writing."

"I'll write when I can." Terra hung up the phone.

Her surroundings appeared sparse after her former life in the big cities of the world. However, she could see as far as she wanted to. No buildings obstructed her view. Thoughts could take flight, soar above the clouds, and soon return to the ground to be a part of everyday life. Here, she could dream. Unspoken dreams of peace and comfort. Enough village conflict to keep life interesting.

Amanda Dianna tapped Terra on the shoulder.

She let the child touch her, and never reached out. Not like a birth mother. Gina would have reached up and

pulled Amanda Dianna close, perhaps allowing the girl to sit in her own lap.

The girl leaned on her shoulder, and joined her in looking out over the landscape. So sparse in the broad view. Full of life, if viewed up close. Life was perfect. Unlike the city with too many things, people, or objects it couldn't be enjoyed. Not so little, one had time to be bored.

Shadows lengthened. A lizard scurried across the ground to a boulder nearby.

Little Rock cried for his bottle.

Amanda Dianna hurried in to pick up her brother. She held him while feeding him.

Terra prepared dinner for themselves and Keama. It was simple. Easy to prepare, eat, and clean up. A gentle lifestyle. Something comforting to accustom herself too.

Tonight seemed different somehow. Bean cakes were as good as always. Water tasted the same, no visible mud or bugs. Everything on the surface was the same.

An undercurrent of change vibrated in the village elder's tiny home. It had been at least two weeks since Gina's death, and she had only spoken to a few neighbors.

Keama ate slowly.

Amanda Dianna finished eating and backed up to play with her brother's waving hands.

Peace and comfort. Something she had never known to this degree. Terra covered Little Rock's toes because they peeked out from under the blanket.

"Will you please go to the school with Amanda Dianna and Little Rock tomorrow?" Keama stacked the empty plates.

Amanda Dianna had not been to the school during the time Terra had been in the village. "She should have been going shouldn't she?"

"I've another year. I'm in no hurry." Amanda Dianna stuffed the last piece of bean cake in her mouth. She giggled, and some of the food dribbled out of her mouth.

"I think the children would appreciate some socialization. Plenty of opportunity for you to learn more history to write about. The school is about a half hour walk east. At the midpoint between three villages."

Something about tomorrow had to be different. Surprises were not something she enjoyed. They tended to lead to complications. Gina's stories were submitted, so a trip to the school was the next logical step in her research.

The rest of the people in the village, and at the school would not be like Gina, Amanda Dianna, and Keama. It would be almost as overwhelming as going into the museum and trying to talk to a group of school children about her journeys and the ancient cultures she had shared for a short time. Her heart beat faster.

Amanda Dianna touched her hand. "It'll be okay. I know most of the children."

Chapter 5

Terra packed a lunch of bean and rabbit cakes. There would be that to look forward to. She slung her backpack on her shoulder and picked up Little Rock.

"How far is the school?"

Amanda Dianna closed the door behind them. "Not sure. The other children left earlier. They are probably there by now."

Normally, she didn't think about modern conveniences when in a village. Today though, a stroller would be nice to push Little Rock rather than carry him an unknown distance. She hadn't quite figured out the undiapered infant signals. A missed call would make a bad impression on the people at the school.

A small crowd of adults gathered on the bare ground along the side of the building.

She chose a boulder near the building's side to sit on. The awning would provide a little shade for Little Rock's face.

Many in the small group glanced up, and then avoided her as if she had broken some taboo. Embarrassed, she glanced at Amanda Dianna.

"It's okay Maja. They haven't started the meeting. Let's sit on the school steps."

As soon as they moved, the adults moved closer to the boulder.

One of the leaders walked up and stood on the rock. After stepping down, she stood halfway between the rock and steps to address the crowd.

"It seems that another teacher will be leaving our small school. Does anyone here have free time for teaching?"

"My Maja does!" Amanda Dianna ran up to the speaker.

Terra hid her face. "I don't usually teach, only learn."

"We need help with the small group activities. There are many different ones to practice the old skills. Why don't you stay for this afternoon's short session?"

"If Little Rock can stay near me."

The speaker nodded and talked of other business that didn't make much sense to Terra.

She pulled out the bean cakes for her and Amanda Dianna. They nibbled and listened to the conversations about classes, teachers, and budget problems. Eventually, she tuned out the words and watched the people's faces and postures. Some were relaxed, others rigid. The blend of cultures did not make it clear if the rigidity was because she as an outsider was there, or if they were stressed about the discussions.

At the start of the afternoon's session, Terra was directed to the outdoor study area. There were seven small clusters of children, all under ten years of age. They paused at the first cluster, a pottery area. Several children were attempting to create something. Messy bits of brightly colored material slithered through their fingers and littered the ground. One girl rubbed her face, and the red and green stuck to her face.

"Most of them make little pots. Some try for figurines." A voice said from behind. "Hi, I'm Shanna. Sadly, most of the children lose interest soon, as the figurines never seem to be as good in their parent's eyes as store bought. No one uses the pieces they make. We would like to change that."

"It is such a shame for the children to put so much thought and effort into them, for them to be forgotten. What can I do to help?"

"That is for you to find out. Keama knows why you are here. Let me show you around." Shanna led Terra and

Amanda Dianna to the next group. "Here is the weaving group. What do you think?"

"The looms are so small. They couldn't weave much useful from this. Placemat sized, not blankets or clothes. The children need to see more of what their products are useful for."

Shanna led the family to the next group of children. These children were obviously excited with their creations.

Amanda Dianna plopped down with them to see what they were working on. "Beadwork! Maja, can I make something?"

"What will you make?"

"A pretty necklace for you to wear!"

Terra laughed. "Okay, keep your brother with you a few minutes."

Amanda Dianna patted the ground beside her, and grabbed a string and beads. She held the string out while pushing a bead toward it.

An older child tapped her shoulder and showed her another way to add the beads.

Shanna and Terra walked towards the next group.

"Is it the same thing? They have no idea what to do with them?"

"Yes. Beads are only worn by children, or on special occasions. Only a few keep the ancestral skills alive. Keama feels that needs to change."

"The adults seem so tired. It's like they don't want to understand the traditions that are barely remembered. They don't want to work for, and keep what little remains, or try to recapture that which is lost."

"Here are the basket weavers. As you can see, they don't have much to work with, so they end up with cup coasters instead of baskets most of the time. Even the

tool making area and painting area are neglected these days. Some adults have memories of making used and useful objects. That seems to be all."

They approached the largest group under a small stand of trees.

"The spirits were happy; and the people were happy." The teacher of the group nodded as she ended the story.

"Another story! Another story!" Children jumped up and down.

"Children love being in this group. By the time they're ten, they view all the old stories as only myths, not important at all." Shanna turned away.

"We need to have someone who can work with the children. Try to keep a spark alive. We need a few who can prepare the entire tourist trade products. We wish they could keep the spirit alive. How can they use the old knowledge in the new world, except the tourist trade?" Shanna turned to her.

"I don't know any solutions." Terra clutched her backpack.

"I'll warn you, some of the primary teachers no longer see a point. They encourage the children to leave for off reservation schools so they will be prepared for the real world."

"Who's to say who really lives in the real world," Terra whispered. They approached the bead area.

"Come on Amanda Dianna, we are going to see Keama. We will come back tomorrow."

Amanda Dianna jumped up with a new necklace in hand. "We can come back!"

The young girl chattered all the way home.

Keama sat on the steps to their tiny adobe home.

"How did it go?"

"I only saw a few teachers. The ones I saw did not seem happy to be there."

"Were any happy?" Keama waited patiently for Terra's reply.

Amanda Dianna settled her brother into his basket.

"Maybe the one at the storytelling group. She had the most excited children." Tears of sadness, or tears of joy for the one small group welled up.

"How do you hope to help?"

"There is a lot to learn, and I really want to listen to the stories too. Amanda Dianna can listen to the stories, and repeat them to me at night. That way I can learn other things, and try to encourage the children to make things they will want to keep forever."

Keama smiled. "Good. Dinner is almost ready. I will cook for you while you teach. You will be busy when you reach home each night."

She wouldn't argue with the village leader.

Chapter 6

Terra left Amanda Dianna and Little Rock at the storytelling group, almost near enough to hear. She chose to work in the pottery area.

A closer look at the materials and tools would show how comfortable the teacher was with her own skills. They weren't using native materials. The clay looked like the manufactured mess she could buy at any big box store.

"What kind of clay is this?" Terra asked.

"Cheap modeling clay. Children enjoy playing with it. Vasa says outside children play with it, so it's okay."

"Aren't they supposed to be learning the way their ancestors made pottery?"

The teacher laughed. She held out her hand. "I am Pamilla. I wish they could. It would take months to create a single project from start to finish. They would be bored before it was done. Not everyone has the skill or talent either."

"Can I do something else?" A little girl clutched a bright pink lopsided container.

"You haven't added any designs! Where are your tools to add designs?" Terra asked.

"What tools?"

"A simple blade of dried grass, or pottery shards, even small rocks make pretty designs."

"Let's find some!" The children scattered across the dry yard.

"How about a cactus needle?"

"Will tree bark work?"

"What about twigs?"

"Yes," Terra said.

One small boy stared at his lump of clay, not even trying to make anything. He didn't seem to notice the other children excited to do more with what they could find.

The scattered children returned with whatever tools they could find in the nearly empty schoolyard.

The story at the storytelling tree volume picked up.

Terra leaned toward the group. "How about we move closer, and try to create the story in our pottery?"

Pamilla handed her a piece of clay to sculpt.

The group moved to a new spot.

Terra spoke to the quiet boy. "What do you see in the clay?"

He looked down at the lump in his hand, and squeezed it tight. Green clay squished through his fingers onto the ground. "Nothing. It is dust, dirt, leftovers. Exactly what my sister said when she destroyed all her childhood figures last year before she went to the big school." He turned and stalked off to the school building.

The other children noticed him, though they ignored his outburst. One girl reached up and whispered to Terra. "He is hurt that she left him here. His outside grades weren't good enough."

"What are outside grades?" Terra picked up the green clay he had dropped and added it to her blue clay.

"The classes we have to learn to live out there in the real world. Is it real out there? I thought this was real. Momma says it isn't." A tear clouded the little girl's eye.

Terra touched her face with her clean hand. "It's real to those who live there."

"She left last week, and hasn't come home. I'm staying with my aunt. My aunt says I can join my mother when my outside grades are good enough. I don't want to go out there. I like it here."

"Don't worry about it now." Terra patted her shoulder and handed her a small seashell. There wasn't much she could say to this child.

This village would be the place she would rather be. It was more real than any city she had visited. She hadn't dreamed of coming here and adopting two children, and couldn't take on a third, even if no one wanted this little girl.

After craft time was over, the teacher walked with Terra part way back to her home.

"We are supposed to keep the children quiet and still. Some of the teachers don't really want us teaching the ancestral ways at all."

"Do they want to lose their culture?"

Pamilla looked away and twiddled her hair. "It's not so much they want to lose their culture, as they don't see it relevant to the future, for themselves, or their children."

There wasn't much she could say about that. Keama had said almost as much. "How about a fun project? The children want to learn, and I know a useful one."

"What's that?"

"Let's teach the children to make bricks."

"Make bricks? I don't think that would go over well."

"We all need bricks to line our fireplaces. One family has eight people in one room. There isn't much space for pretty things. Personalized bricks could make a small wall to share other projects."

"Um. We are supposed to stay in the circle, and we only have two hours a day. That would take months, and the children would be too dirty to go in the school afterwards."

"Learning to be an adult, and playing in the dirt, are what being a kid is all about. They could each personalize

their bricks however they liked. I'm sure they would enjoy it."

"If Keama will agree, I will. Don't mention it to any of the other teachers."

Terra hurried home with all kinds of plans. She had learned so many different pottery techniques over the years, it would be fun to show and share them with the children here. Especially that little girl who wanted to stay here, and not leave. The boy who had given up might not come back to the village once he left. Though, if the children of today created useful tools, and he visited as an adult with children, he might instill in his own children a dream to return the village.

The next day, Pamilla had tools ready for her children.

Terra chose to help in the weaving section. She wouldn't be able to hear the stories. Though she could learn more about another teacher.

The teacher leered at her. "Please stay quiet if you wish to watch. No speaking is allowed while the children work."

Children attempted to weave on tiny plastic looms without any direction or help from their "teacher." She only allowed them a handful of dried material, as well as a few lengths of string and cloth.

After about ten minutes of silence, and listening to the other children having a good time elsewhere, she attempted to speak to the teacher. "Where do the children gather their supplies?"

The teacher slapped her book down. "They don't. Now be quiet or leave."

Terra stood up awkwardly, and searched for Shanna.

Shanna sat with the pottery group, holding the interesting creations the children had made today. One

girl had managed to make coasters with a shell design impressed on them.

"Something new is always nice." Shanna said.

She slid back out of the group and patted the ground.

"How is your visit today?"

Terra sat. "Not well. I wanted to learn where the supplies for weaving come from. Why tiny plastic looms instead of wood?"

Shanna looked towards the storytelling group so few people would overhear her. "The stuff is store bought. No one knows where it comes from, or seems to care. The right kind of natural materials don't grow here anyway. Plastic prevents splinters. Somehow, I don't think our ancestors worried about splinters."

"So the children have no idea where to find the materials they need to actually weave something of value."

"They have no idea where they come from. Or the reason weaving is so important to our history." A tear glistened in the corner of Shanna's eye.

"Shouldn't the start of each weaving session be the story of how weaving is essential to the fabric of the community? There are so many different weaving stories. They could even be used as a history lesson to compare how weaving is essential to, though different in multiple cultures. It is sad to see the children sitting silent and bored through an activity that is meant to be social. A time to share thoughts, stories, and feelings."

Shanna giggled. "Not with Vasa at the helm. I know what you mean. It should be a time of joy. Not sadness and loss of hope."

Terra went home that evening and reported all she had seen and heard to Keama. "What can I possibly do? I want the children to value weaving. I don't know the

stories they need to hear. I don't know the facts about the materials. How can I teach them anything? Would she even allow me to teach anyway?"

Amanda Dianna sat her cup down. "She doesn't like anyone. She only teaches here, because the other schools won't take her. She's too sour."

"If one regular class does a report on the weaving stories of other cultures, each child can choose a different culture to report on. Would the regular teachers be receptive to that?" Terra clenched her fists. There had to be way to teach the children what they needed to know.

"Know the teachers better. Write your ideas down. Don't forget them. Keep listening and watching." Keama stacked the empty plates.

"You like reports?" Amanda Dianna tugged her hand.

"I do. Guess it comes from doing reporting style writing for a living."

"They can tell stories; I know they can. No one wants to be caught telling stories. They might get in trouble." She scrunched her face and ran outside.

Terra picked up Little Rock. Children should be telling stories. That was how they learned in every culture she had visited.

Except one.

One where children grew into adults with no knowledge of past, present, or future.

Chapter 7

Terra took the role Shanna had given her seriously. She had thought about not going to the school this last day of the week. Online research would give her more ideas about how she could help the children and the school.

Her email was full of glowing reports for Gina's stories. People always felt sorry for survivors of cancer. A dozen offered to take the children and raise them. For once, she was thankful she mentioned neither the name of the village, nor the name of the children in the articles she had sent to her editor.

There was a knock at the door. Shanna waited on her front step. "I think we should chat when no one can hear us."

Terra looked around, half expecting to see wild dogs nearby. "Come in. What are you thinking?"

"It seems other people have heard us speaking. A few are afraid we will convince the children that heritage is valuable. I wish we could ban them from teaching the children. It isn't easy. They will always influence some to leave. Those most easily influenced, wouldn't stay here anyway."

"How can I do what I was asked to do, if the teachers are against me?"

"Some are. Some aren't. This cover up has been going on for years. Nearly one quarter of our village has left in that time. The true teachers see you as a breath of fresh air. They aren't sure if you will stick it out. They want to trust you. Though that would be open rebellion, and would you be strong enough to carry through to a brighter tomorrow?" Shanna crossed her arms and leaned back, staring at Terra over her nose.

Terra couldn't answer. The fear, pain, and frustration she thought she had left behind, contrasted with this place of warmth and beauty. She had never really stood up and fought for anything. Always, she had worked behind the scenes and watched people fail because they would not heed her warnings. She had done the jobs asked of her, and had never felt compelled to want power for herself. That wasn't her style. She wanted to learn everything there was to know about life. To live, not worrying about the lives of others.

Shanna waited.

Shanna's patience must be ebbing. Her school died a slow death, a little less spark each day. This had to take a physical, as well as an emotional toll.

"I can't lead. I don't have the strength. I am a supporter. One who works in the background to keep things running smoothly." It would never work.

"What can I do?" She looked up at Shanna.

Shanna waited. After a few moments, she pulled books from Terra's shelf.

Terra reached to grab them.

Shanna set them carefully in Terra's lap. She turned, and walked out of the house, and down the path.

Terra looked over the titles. They were all of her favorite cultural and mythology books. How did Shanna know which ones she had, and where each was located? As she thumbed through them, she became lost in the stories she had read so many times, they were old friends. Often, her only friends.

Evening came with a knock at the open door. Startled from deep thoughts, Terra looked up to several people at the open door.

"I'd invite you in. I don't think there's enough room. We can sit on the shady side of the house." Outside is by far

the easiest place to meet with a group. It left an avenue for escape.

They sat in a small circle on benches made to look like tree trunks. Peaceful as the evening seemed, Terra had her doubts.

The Storyteller sat directly across from her. "I'm Una. I've read many of the things you have written. We know you value culture and heritage. Will you help us instill these values in our children?"

"Some don't want them to know."

"We have come to tell you know who is for history, and who is not. I realized you were as excited as me with what we could do in the pottery area if given the opportunity." Pamilla motioned to the basket teacher.

"My sister, Ren, is mostly deaf. She would be glad to have you in the basket area." Una touched her sister's hand.

Ren smiled and held out her hands to Terra. "I try to talk. Not well. My sister talks for us both."

"And last is Bea, our quiet bead maker," Shanna said. "She needs your help too. While we choose not to speak badly of others, you have met the best and the worst in your few days helping our current teachers."

Shanna glanced back behind them. "Vasa, who teaches weaving, would rather only teach business skills. Callie, who teaches tool making, prefers to teach computer building. And Dawna who teaches painting, prefers to teach drama."

"Business skills, drama, and building computers won't be of much use here. Especially for the young children. Or is that the answer. They want the children to have skills that will pull them from their families, emptying this village." Why would they beg for broken families?

A slight rustling sound caused everyone to turn their heads. To their surprise, Amanda Dianna led Keama to sit beside Bea. As she settled onto the bench, the stress of her journey was apparent. Her hands grasped her walking stick for strength.

"Time changes, cultures change. They want to move into the future, leaving the poverty they have always known behind. They want the past forgotten so that poverty is forgotten. They see no use for the cultural tidbits. They are from some of the more valued families in local villages, who know not what to think of them."

Keama waited to catch her breath, glancing around the circle, resting at last on Bea. "Bea, you have something to share that may provide direction."

Bea showed no emotion as she looked forward, over everyone's head. "Bran has asked me to marry him, in a semi-traditional way. He wants us to stay here as well. We must build our home according to ancient standards. There are no builders left here who can create the adobe blocks we would need for our home." A single tear slipped down her cheek.

"I know how to make adobe bricks. The process takes about six months naturally. There are also ancient ways to speed the process. We adults could never do it all. We need the children. They would be so excited. We could have the bricks preparing in no time." Terra said.

"I doubt we could do it in class. It's too messy. Even if we could, there are too many against us." Pamilla leaned toward Bea.

"We would have to do it on Saturdays. They have to be checked weekly. We will find someone to help the children with tool making and painting, even weaving the floor mats." Terra leaned into the group and looked around their faces.

Modern culture had affected them some. A glimmer of a smile appeared on many faces. A trace, of the future they weren't sure they wanted for their children.

"Bran wants us to add our home to your village. We could meet here, at the wading tree." Bea's eyes lit up. "We'll have people from all three small villages here. It'll be fun."

Shanna leaned forward. "Baskets and weaving can be taught together. We have unemployed fathers who can teach tool making for what you have in mind. As for the painting, we can find someone, perhaps. We will gather the adults and children tomorrow, in the field beyond the wading tree."

The small group scattered, separately so as not to seem to all have been at the same place at the same time.

Amanda Dianna placed her hand on Terra's knee. "Maja, what are you thinking?"

Terra focused to the child she had never dreamed of calling her own. "The old feelings. Pains a child should never be burdened with."

Amanda Dianna refused to have her questions unanswered. "I am not like other children. I always listened to my birth mother's thoughts and feelings."

Terra wanted to look away. How sad is that? At age four, to be burdened with her mother's talk of life and death. Instead, she took both hands of her now daughter, and held them close. No visible tears. "Dear child, what a life you have led. You, like so many others, have left childhood behind far too soon. You should be out playing dolls with other little girls, and running games to build strength. I have been remiss in keeping you here, helping me raise your brother."

Amanda Dianna laughed. A laugh so like a robin's twitter, Terra's heart ached even more. "I stay now because you need me. You need me to help you know yourself, and everyone here. Soon, I will be playing with others, once my brother can walk and talk. By then, you will have been a mother long enough. You will no longer need me." With that, she pulled back, and skipped off around the corner of the house as if she intended to take off now to her new friends, and leave Terra behind.

What does she know? What can I have possibly said to lead her to believe those things about me? She is a child. Even so, she can see my heart as well as the old one can. I have no secrets now from either. I will always need this daughter of my heart. She has attached herself to my soul. I cannot imagine her leaving me; not for anyone, or anything.

That evening Terra settled the dinner on Keama's table, which Amanda Dianna had so faithfully carried for her. She knew it would be a time of many questions, with hopefully, many answers.

Terra dipped food onto each plate. "Why do some of the women wish the reservation to fail?"

Keama appeared deep in thought for a few moments, with her eyes half closed. Then she looked to Amanda Dianna. "Child what do you see?"

"There is much missing here. There are no jobs, like in the city I came from. There is no doctor. There are no real spiritual leaders. Other than you, of course, as grandmother to us all." Amanda Dianna looked down at her plate and kicked her feet around.

"She sees well for one her age. If she had only come sooner. She is right. There are few opportunities here, which outsiders would see. It takes those opportunities to make money to do the things so many want to do. I never

trained a replacement. Now it is too late. Many believe when I die, we will no longer exist. And those left will go to other villages, on this, or another reservation, or out into the other world."

Terra gulped the air as if she had been underwater. "I hope you will be here a long time. This village feels like home to me."

"Do you understand and accept death, if it comes to visit?" Keama asked.

"Yes. I hope it stays away for now. This community has so much invisible opportunity, we need to make it visible to all."

"You do realize that here, in many ways like America itself, we are a melting pot. It seems many sent here were the least ambitious, least wanted, of so many tribes over the years."

"Were they the least ambitious, or the most homesick? Did they look for the opportunities in this apparent barren wasteland, while their dreams have not born fruit?"

"They did bear some fruit." Amanda Dianna leaped off her seat. "There is a marvelous museum that was created a few decades ago. It is off the reservation; in town, near the school the children go to when they go away."

Keama smiled at Amanda Dianna's excitement. "That would be a good field trip for the whole school. You have much to do to help build connections and pride in our community."

Chapter 8

Terra woke up before dawn and gathered food for the day. It would be a long, fun day. Perhaps it would be as fun as the time she had helped one village build a hut for a newly married couple on their wedding day.

Sunlight slowly peeked over the near desert scrub land. The short walk slipped by almost unnoticed with the beautiful scenery.

Little Rock wasn't heavy this morning. She had grown used to his weight on her chest. It wouldn't be long, and he would no longer need her to carry him.

Amanda Dianna swung the basket with their lunch. She chattered constantly and waved to anyone she saw.

Only adults and a few teens arrived as early as they did. All from the other villages.

"We decided to plan today." Una said. "The planning and math will be boring for the younger children. We will go over it for them to know the whole process. They are playing by the stream, so they will know how long it takes."

"Amanda Dianna, would you like to go join them? I can keep Little Rock here. He will be fine."

The girl grinned. Amanda Dianna looked at the adults waiting on her decision, and then glanced at the children near the stream. "Call me if you need me." She ran to the children by the stream. When she reached them, she glanced back one time, then happily splashed in the stream.

First, they had to decide where to build, and how big of a house. In the process, they had to decide how many, and what size adobe blocks they would need. Terra started to drift off listening to the laughter and squeals beyond the ridge.

"Our first project will be to go into town to buy the wood to make the brick forms. We can make them at the stream during the week, or next weekend," one of the fathers said.

"We should let the children help with that. Will the stream provide enough water?" Pamilla asked.

"If it doesn't, we can request a water truck on Saturdays. We will have to be careful though," Bran answered.

"Well, it looks like we are done for the day. We haven't needed our lunches. Be ready next week," Shanna said.

"Shanna, Amanda Dianna wanted to go to the museum, do you think the children would enjoy that today? They could see what they are trying to recreate."

"Sounds like a fun way to spend the afternoon. Bran's truck is big enough so they can all ride," Shanna said.

Terra walked down to invite the children to go to the museum. She expected a few to not want to go. After all, it was nearby, and they had likely visited it many times, even if Amanda Dianna never had.

The excited children laughed, chattered, and ran up to the wading tree. None declined to visit the museum.

"I think the children are too wet to go right now. Perhaps lunch first," Terra said.

Sandy, wet children climbed over the tailgate of the truck.

"Maybe lunch will calm them down, as well as dry them out." Shanna pulled out her lunch basket.

Amanda Dianna played with the other children. She appeared to lose herself in the fun, not paying attention to Terra, or her brother.

Terra stood up to go to their house to pick up her notepad. She left Little Rock beside Shanna.

Amanda Dianna appeared by her side, obviously only enjoying her friends with one eye towards her, and Little Rock.

At last, everyone was ready to go. Even with the sides up, it was dangerous to have so many people in the back of the truck. They were used to traveling this way. It was ten slow miles into town.

The museum was in an old tumble down building, plaster tumbled off the side. Large bits lay curled on the ground.

The museum did not appear safe to enter.

Cactus grew almost into the doorway.

She walked up to the fallen plaster, to see if it was attached at all.

It was actually secure. Someone had gone to a great deal of trouble to make the building look like the forgotten remains of an ancient building. Even the cactus was unlikely to grow into the door. It was a slow growing cactus in tilted buried pots, which could be moved if it ever grew too close.

She followed Shanna and several children into the building, and glanced back one more time. Do they want to keep the heritage alive, by treating it like a carnival show? Or, do they want people to be afraid to come in here and see what they could learn, and do?

The first exhibit was of simple tools. Stone axes and arrowheads sparkled under glass. There was even a dramatization of a bench and a hammerstone breaking off arrowhead chips. Something wasn't right. Many arrowheads were unlabeled, and a few mislabeled.

"Shanna, these aren't all from the same era are they? They aren't even from the same parts of the country." Terra whispered.

Shanna looked closer.

The children played with the modern reproductions that lay on the public display. A few stones with chips already out gave the children an opportunity to make their own arrowheads.

"Probably not. While it doesn't teach them specifics, it does teach them to maybe see things from more points of view. While better than nothing, I'd prefer to see them labeled. In fact, that one is from Europe, and it is beside the Clovis point, and next to the Folsom points. They are similar, and may have developed from one into the other. It's disrespectful for them to be unlabeled, or mislabeled."

"Can the children keep the ones they make today?" Terra asked. "They may be useful."

"I'll check with the curators. Talk to the group a few minutes."

Terra looked around the group of happy scholars. "Please be on the lookout for ideas of small things you can make to share. We will be working on a special out of school project. Everyone needs to be ready to open their eyes, and see what fun things they find."

Shanna walked back to the group. "We can keep the tools you made today. Hold on to them. You will need them next Saturday."

The buzz grew louder. The children moved on to the next exhibit.

A dramatization of women weaving baskets and blankets filled the next exhibit. The children looked for the associated play area, and found nothing. It was empty. A few pieces of straw lay on the ground. Not enough for practicing.

"Look at the pattern of the blanket on display," Terra said. "What do you see?"

"It's nice and colorful." A girl responded before running on to the next exhibit.

"I wish we could find basket materials like that. What are they?" Another girl pointed to the colorful pile of baskets.

"Do you really want to know?" Terra asked.

"Yes, yes." They all turned to her.

Shanna shook her head.

"Not now. Soon. A promise spoken can never be broken," Terra said.

The stares were definite. They stared at her body, not at her face. At least they know some of the old ways.

Adobe bricks and houses were behind the next wall. However, the small adobe replica had some kind of reed grass thatched roof, more representative of an island culture. Terra tried not to laugh. "How would you like to live in one of these?"

"Wouldn't the sun shine though?" The boy who spoke turned to her and shivered. "It'd be cold at night."

"It would be cold." An interesting mix of culture in that display. Nowhere near accurate for any village she had seen.

The horseshoe display area bent back toward the front of the museum. A replica of a tattered beaded dress was the next display. Somehow, it didn't look like it belonged to any tribe Terra had studied. Surprisingly, it didn't look too out of place here.

"Did people really wear that?"

"Sometimes, yes." Shanna said. "However, think how much work went into making each and every bead. Every hole had to be punched by hand. Then all sewn onto a garment. You wouldn't wear an outfit with beads on the back every day. They would break and fall off in no time, much less time than it took to make it."

The children moved on to the last exhibit. Here were fake rocks with obviously fake paintings. They were so

phony; Terra was almost ashamed for the children to see them.

"Where did their paints come from?"

"Did they practice much?"

Shanna glanced at the entrance. "They made their paints. We can discuss it soon. Think about your favorite colors, and favorite ideas you would like to have a picture of."

Children chattered on the long ride home. Shadows lengthened. A cool breeze blew. Goose bumps covered her arms and legs.

Monday, they would know the strife the visit and plans would make. Would it divide homes? I've seen one of the men who came with us today with Vasa more than once. One of the boys might have been Vasa's. The museum curators could be for, or against heritage. Who here was being fully honest, and who merely living out of fear? What fears, and why were they afraid?

As an outsider, I have more to fear and lose than anyone else here. The villagers may fear losing family and friends. I couldn't lose my home and new children.

This is my home now.

Instead of joining in the fun crowd, she took her daughter's hand, and walked off toward her home, deep in thought.

Terra thought she heard her name called.

She didn't turn back. Thinking was more important.

Chapter 9

At dinner Keama barley glanced at her.

Amanda Dianna shared her story of the museum visit and playing with the other children.

A knock at the door surprised her, especially since the door was wide open.

"Come in," Keama said.

Shanna walked through the door, carrying more food. "I brought enough for me, and some to share. Do you mind if I close the door?"

"Close it, and sit down. Your squash cakes are always delicious." Keama reached for one.

Shanna sat directly across from Terra. "What happened? Your mood change concerned many."

Terra sat her fork down on her plate. "A rush of feelings. It was the wrong time, wrong place. I don't know the names of so many here. Nor their relationships. Though they have a certain relationship today, it has changed, and it will change again. Who can we trust? Do those who say they don't want the past; do they even really know what they don't want? Why don't they leave if they don't want to be here?"

Terra covered her eyes. "I'm finally happy. Give me some time to enjoy it before you take it away."

Hands touched her shoulders and back.

Swirling thoughts kept her eyes closed.

She looked up, to see what she never expected. For one-second, Shanna looked different, almost like. No, it couldn't be. Vasa was nothing like Shanna. Of course, in such a tiny cluster of villages, everyone must be related.

"Maja, we can all be trusted to be who we are. That doesn't change."

Shanna reached for Terra's hands, and grasped them with the strength of someone who was used to being responsible. "They can't leave because someone they love is still here. The bitterness is tearing everyone apart. Would it be better if they left? For some, yes. For others, it would split mothers and fathers, leaving children with no idea why one parent abandoned them."

Shanna glanced at Keama, who nodded back. "I know how hard it can be. My mother was one who left. My father remarried. Vasa grew up admiring my mother, not her own. She wanted to be her daughter. She planned to go, and was even packed when a local boy begged her to stay one more night, one more ceremony. Their child is here, and wants to stay here." Shanna's voice wavered.

"My sister is trapped and cannot leave, for she would leave husband, father, and child. If she doesn't leave, she will break up more families by staying. She'll hurt more people. Will she do more damage than good to our culture, fragile as it is? She is my sister. However, I would be glad if she went to my mother's house. I would miss her. I cannot ask, or demand, she go."

How can I ever keep the relationships straight? It would never be easy. She, or an outsider like her, was the only one who could bring peace to this village that she now called home.

"You have no idea how much it means to us, to have you come here and call this place home," Shanna said. "Most who come here would never dream of calling it home. Keep looking for the answers. For me. Please find them."

Shanna let go of her hands. They weren't quite as strong now. They trembled as she slid them back across the table.

"I can try; I must relearn to not be so overwhelmed by my feelings."

Keama's cackle broke the mood. "Maybe the gift of sharing emotions is good. If we share them in bits, they don't overwhelm anyone. Sometimes, those who have the least to lose, and the most to lose, are the same person. And it isn't always who we think it is."

"What will happen next week?" Terra asked.

Shanna chuckled. "Vasa will let us do whatever we want for her favorite cousin Bea's wedding. We cannot do it during school hours. Most of the school council are on our side. Even they admit, what we want the children to work on cannot be done in the strict timeframes of the school day."

"So we can teach the children on Saturdays all we want. As long as we treat it as if it is only a memory, for Bea's wedding, kind of like a play." Terra said. "Should I return to help the other teachers, or work on research so we have all the right tools and equipment?"

"We have plenty of unemployed adults who can research. They can even find the places the native grasses grow for the floor mats. Some know where to find the materials to make the marriage blanket." Keama covered the plate of squash cakes.

Terra gazed at the faces of those she knew best. After only a few months, she knew them better than anyone in her life, ever. "Let's be ready for Monday then."

Chapter 10

Monday. A day Terra had never dreaded so much. Not like other people with five day a week jobs. Here, she felt trapped as she never had before on the outskirts of a village. Before, she could always leave the village drama to go home to Boston. No more. She had agreed to raise Amanda Dianna and Little Rock. As tribal children, they couldn't leave the reservation with her.

This was also the most complex community she had visited. With occupants in the three small villages, as well as relatives on, and off the reservation. Most villages she had visited had few daily ties outside of their remote community.

She had to keep her hopes up and learn what she could about those who wanted save the community, and those who wanted it to disappear forever. As an outsider, Terra couldn't show favoritism to either side. So today, she would visit Callie's tool making group, and try to understand her, as well as her choices.

Amanda Dianna and Little Rock sat with Una, the Storyteller. The girl's blond head bobbed in and out of a sea of black pony tails.

The only open seat in Callie's circle was directly opposite of her. Terra sat down. Callie talked to the children about safety when working with stone.

"Most people only see tools as the implements used to make other things. Our tools are far more than that."

A little girl grabbed at the sharp points on the ground.

Callie covered them. "Our hands are our first tools. Without them we could make no others."

She lifted her feet into the air and waved them at the children. "Feet our second tools. Without feet, we could not find supplies or food."

Children laughed.

Callie blinked and covered her ears. "Eyes and ears back up what our skin feels."

A girl grabbed at the cover over the tools.

Callie, stopped her. "Without each of these, tools would be difficult, if not impossible, to use or make. While making tools, we must feel them, see what we are doing, and listen for the correct sounds. If you damage your hands or feet, or lose your vision or hearing, making tools, and daily life becomes more difficult."

It was a good speech to give to students for their first tool making.

"Today we are going to practice using a hide scraper. We actually won't be here in the circle. We are going over to where that hide is stretched on a frame." Callie pointed it out.

Children chattered.

"We didn't always have frames, and often merely stretched them on the ground with pegs. Let's go on over, and I will show you how. Each of you will have the chance to scrape a section of hide. When it cures, you can take your piece home to share with your parents."

Terra followed the group over to the frame.

Callie was teaching the children, and they seemed interested in learning. She demonstrated how a hide should be scraped, and then handed over the tool to the first child and stepped back to where Terra stood.

"As you can see, I do try to teach. I know why you are here."

"You seem interested, and so knowledgeable with tools. Tell me more about yourself."

"Oh, I am interested. I learned it all when I was young. Soaking it up like a sponge. In a few hours, I can make more replica tools than the local trade stores sell in

months. I even have my own website to sell tools and other crafts on."

"I heard you preferred to teach computers to the children. I know they need to know that too."

"I think they need their heritage Terra, I really do. I don't see how it is useful in today's world. When will they ever use these tools? Maybe a few obscure places in the world still do things the old ways. More as research projects rather than for actual use. Even replicas sell to hang on a wall and not be used."

Terra lowered her head. Other villages had felt the same way as children grew up and left for the world outside the village. Modern tools had made so many skills obsolete.

Callie helped the next child start his section of hide. She returned to watch him.

There had to be a way to convince her of the value of the tools. She was so close. Terra leaned closer and spoke into her ear. "Many of these tools come in handy during power outages. Some daily activities we put off when the power goes out. What would happen if the power never came back on?"

"How can the children hope to make a living using these skills? I'm the only one on the reservation who makes these tools, and I don't make half a car payment each month. I think the skills need to be remembered and taught. They are easily forgotten if not used regularly, and that won't happen."

"So we might have a stockpile of tools. No problem."

Callie laughed. "Once, toolmakers were greatly revered. How can I ask someone to learn this when it won't provide them with a living wage? Even in outside society, think of the opinion people have of factory workers. They are the toolmakers of today. Unwanted by the people who are most likely to buy what they make. At

least with computers, children can learn something they can use."

"True. I wonder. If we could teach the children to learn certain programs so that we could form a company on the reservation?"

Another child needed Callie's attention for the moment.

The teachers could only teach so much, and not go against the wishes of the parents. There had to be something the adults of tomorrow could do that would allow preservation, keep them in their village, and in touch with the world enough to economically survive in the upside down economic system of modern society. They deserved to understand the true riches of life, which outside society devalued.

"I understand. Let's see what we can do to help the children. It may take some time to come up with a plan." The hide on the rack wiggled. If it were her skin, the children who scraped it were the adults of the village scraping her skin away, to reveal a hidden dream.

"Good luck. I'll be here to listen if you have any ideas." Callie turned back to the hide and two girls tussling over a scraper.

The girls peeked around the hide and waved at Terra.

Terra enjoyed the rest of the activity, and scraped her own section of hide. She had observed other styles, and other tools in the surviving ancient societies she had visited around the world. Each style and tool had its own advantages and disadvantages.

Callie's words and Amanda Dianna's renditions of the Storyteller's version of a trickster tale combined as Terra drifted off to sleep. Who is the true trickster? Those who want happiness and a simple life? Or, those who want what the world has to offer? At what point do you know what to hold, and what to let go?

Chapter 11

Terra chose the bead area on Tuesday.

"Amanda Dianna wanted to help. I think I need to learn what I can from you. What do you teach the children to make?"

"Not really anything. They make necklaces. Or play with the pretty colors."

"All plastic? Have they ever seen you make a real bead?"

Bea laughed. "I couldn't make one. I wish I could. Not only do I not have the tools; I've never seen it done. I don't begin to know how to use beads to make anything the way our ancestors did."

"I've seen beads made. Though it was different than how your ancestors made and used them. I've seen shell and wood beads made, even stone beads. Have you told the children the stories about beads?"

Bea sifted the loose sand at her feet. "I was raised in the city. My mother left the village to find a job to support us children. I never heard the stories. They were banned at home. I am trying to learn them. It takes longer now."

"If you want a proper beaded wedding dress, we will have to research the stories, and who your ancestors were, so we can find the correct ones to use."

Bea lowered her head to hide a blush. "My mother won't come. She is ashamed of me. She claims she left here to give me everything. And I threw it all away. My father died in a factory accident, and my siblings are all successful business owners who won't let me meet my nieces and nephews, in case I encourage them. They aren't even allowed to know who they are or where they came from. Maybe we should have a simple wedding."

The divides were deep. Broken cultural identities were still strong for Bea, and the choices of her close family hurt her more. "That is all the more reason to have the traditional wedding. Your nieces and nephews may come here when they turn eighteen or older. They may come looking for their heritage, and you will have lived it. How can you tell the complete story if you don't live it?"

"I didn't live all of it. I didn't have the coming of age ceremonies. Or many others, so I can't tell them of those."

"Sure you can. You can participate in many children's coming of age ceremonies, all the ones you missed. It may not be the same. Though, if you think about it, they would enjoy hearing those stories from someone their own age as well. Tell them who to visit and ask for the recent ceremonies."

A girl tugged Terra's sleeve. "Can we help make her dress?"

"Once we know how to make it, yes. We can only work on these things on Saturdays though, okay?" Terra said.

The girl nodded and bent her head back to the beads she was stringing.

Terra sorted the beads by color. She'd find a way to make Bea happier, and less scared of being cut off from her family. At least, she had one.

She is so much like me. Her story is different. Maybe not so much suffering. No one to rely on other than Bran. She is Vasa's cousin, who also wants everyone to leave.

Is she also Shanna's cousin?

Terra dropped the beads in her hands. Red, yellow, green, blue, and clear all mixed and mingled in the pile on the ground. Separated, the colors were clear. When combined, their mingled shine set them apart.

Chapter 12

Wednesday, the circle of the bare schoolyard appeared for a moment as a picture out of place and time. How stunning it would appear if viewed under a good artist's brush. Even with the best brush, the invisible beauty of the scene could never be fully portrayed. It would only mirror reality.

"Good afternoon Amanda Dianna. Will you be joining us again today?" Una walked by with several children in tow.

"Yes." She slung the lunch basket on her arm.

Una took Little Rock from Terra's arms. "Come visit this evening. My family will be at Keama's. We will have a nice picnic."

"We'll be there."

Amanda Dianna chattered with the other children as they scurried to the best spots by the Storyteller's tree.

Dawna already had the painting circle ready. Only paper and crayons for painting. At least it was coloring art.

She arrived with the youngest children in the school.

"Hello Terra. Are you joining us today?"

"Yes. I hope that's okay."

The children scattered around her to sit on the ground.

"Here is what we are going to do today. Choose your favorite color and imagine your favorite object. Now draw the outline on your paper. Close your eyes if you need to."

Eyes and papers fluttered. Children tried to draw on the firm ground. Most of them drew pictures of homes. Some drew pictures of family.

"Now choose your second favorite color. Here are a few small items, take one out of the basket, and pass it around." The basket contained various styles and weaves of cloth, dried leaves, dried plants, and fossils.

"Now, place this under your outline, and lightly color over your object. Let me show you how."

Dawna smiled at the trials and triumphs as the children attempted the simple art project. "Now after you are done, you can color and trade the objects around. Try not to disturb our neighbors."

She walked over to where Terra sat. "I know it's not what you expect to see."

"I guess the school council doesn't have the money for paints, and doesn't want to risk children getting painted?"

"Basically. I do teach a true painting class at night to the older students who go to the off reservation school in town. No one really sees the point. Our beautiful landscape," she looked out across the land, "is seen by too many as 'open and barren.' Only a few artists ever make it big. Like so many other professions, there is only room for a few at the top. I try to teach the brightest in the various forms of art. I really don't need the competition. There isn't enough money to go around."

"Can you teach a few to paint the pottery styles for Bea's wedding? The children really want to be part of it."

"I thought about it. No. It needs to be done by a professional for cultural reasons. I don't paint well enough for that. The children can help paint scenes on bricks and other things. Plus, they can paint other gifts to be given after the wedding."

"You teach drama as well?"

"I tried to be a film star for a while to supplement my art. Then, I came home. Now, I teach. By teaching acting, I am actually teaching so many things that are cultural without anyone knowing it. I wish I didn't have to teach as if I wanted the children to go away."

"Do you want them to go away?"

"I see so little opportunity for them here. It's easier to say how many adults have jobs, than how many don't. Money is needed for everything. We receive government grants. A business on the reservation, and we could lose government money. The council created visitor restrictions, so anything we try to build has to be off reservation. The reservation is so large; it can be more than an hour's drive to any off reservation business every day if people work."

It shouldn't be that way. Terra clutched her hands. The people on the reservation's hands were tied up in the red tape. "It's a true catch system. I wish I knew an answer. I don't think it's sending the children away from their families. All cultures once lived without the need for money. I wish they could again."

The children finished their drawings, and brought them to Terra and Dawna, nearly bowling them over with excitement.

Drawing isn't that much different than painting, and the skills can be built on. Dawna is right. Government can cause unintended consequences in the laws they write to protect people. Sometimes, those laws prevent people from trying because they can clearly see that they would suffer losses they can't afford; while fighting to climb out of the hole, often dug by others.

Chapter 13

Amanda Dianna ran to join the crowd in front of Keama's home. It seemed half the village was here ahead of them. She placed their offerings on the table set up outside and hurried to the crowd of small children. A young girl, playing, not even looking back at her brother.

"She is happy," Ren said.

"Yes, it's about time too. The tears still come, late at night. She doesn't need me as much anymore. I miss her help with Little Rock." Terra opened the tilted basket.

"What help do you need from her now, with a dozen adults to watch the baby? Come join in the conversation," Una said.

Terra sat Little Rock on the ground in the shade beside her. He was already turning over and rolling. Soon he would be crawling.

"How is group learning going? Are you ready to visit with my sister tomorrow?" Una wove strands of grass.

"I think I am. I am learning people's personalities. I have some real hope that we can all keep our homes here. I think I need to know Vasa better though, outside of school."

Una laughed. "Keama thought you might like to hear Ren's story, and it would be easier here, without the rush of children."

A good idea. "Ren, what is your story?"

"My story is complex." A short pause before she began again.

"I always wanted to be here. I didn't want to leave. Mother begged me to go. She thought."

A long pause occurred as Ren watched the running children. "I had better chances out there. Being mostly

deaf, I had less chance here, or so she thought." Ren twisted the napkin in her hand.

"Mother meant well." Una said. "It hurt her to send my twin off to school, and to try to find a job. Everyone convinced her it was for her, and her future. It nearly broke mother's heart. She wanted to keep us both here, safe with her."

"I begged to come home. Finally, she let me. She was glad. I don't want to go again. If the children can stay, I can stay," Ren said.

"I think the children should have a chance to visit the city once, if they want. Though, they need a place to come home to."

"I would think you have more to offer here, and you have your experiences to show the children how valuable life here is. What else do you enjoy besides making baskets?"

"Feeling the ceremony songs. They are deep in my heart. I want to share deep music, and keep it alive. With permission to teach drums, I can teach in ways a regular hearing person would never feel."

An interesting idea. That was part of the answer. To have a place to teach people who wanted to reconnect to a forgotten, or lost past.

What was she missing? She rested her hand on the ground, reaching to where she had placed Little Rock.

Except. He wasn't there.

Terra turned around.

Little Rock was under the food table holding onto a dog's fur.

So much for watching his first crawl. "I guess we better braid a leash. And choose a new name for Little Rock."

Laughter resounded through the small area. People turned to watch the little boy pulling on the dog.

The dog stood there, until one last tug from the child jerked her head. The dog turned her head towards the child, causing Little Rock to plop down, releasing his grip. Then the dog trotted off a few paces, and glanced back at the baby.

Amanda Dianna ran forward to catch her little brother. He was now too big for her to move.

"He is a fast growing child," Keama said. "Terra, when will you have a naming ceremony for him?"

"Soon. He definitely needs it now. I think I know what his name shall be. Should we have it before, or after, the house building ceremony?"

"Before, I think. He will need a strong name." Keama picked up a plate and called for the meal to begin.

Chapter 14

The phone rang.

Terra turned from the computer and picked it up.

"Hello Terra, how are you?" Janet asked.

"I'm fine."

"I haven't seen any stories from you lately anywhere. What are you working on?"

"Not stories at the moment." Or stories she wasn't ready to tell, because she was living them. Too close to her heart, with an unknown outcome. Also, the villagers might not want this story told.

"My daughter is getting married Friday. She and her boyfriend decided to have their wedding at a ranch not far from where you are staying. They want to put the apartment lease in their name. So can I bring you the papers while I'm down there?"

"Come and visit. It'll be busy. We have a naming ceremony Saturday morning. Right afterwards, we will be building bricks for a home."

"Sounds like good story material."

"No. Ceremonies are private. They aren't really shared with the world at large. Though the outcomes may be." This set of ceremonies wasn't something Janet should see. If Janet knew how deeply she had delved into the politics of this village, she would drag her screaming back to Boston.

"I'll see you Friday then."

"That's fine. Have a great trip! See you soon."

Actually, the public or private question of the ceremonies was something she should ask Keama. Regardless of Keama's answer, it would be best for Janet to not see Little Rock's naming ceremony. Maybe she would stay only long enough to sign the papers, and go

back to wherever her daughter was having her marriage ceremony.

Friday morning rays of sunshine stretched out across the desert. It would be a long day at Keama's learning all she needed to know for the ceremony tomorrow. Lines of light echoed hope, from every mythology she knew.

"Keama, I know how important this ceremony is. Who will represent Little Rock? I am not of the status to do so."

"No one else expects to be. You must do it. You cannot change who is his caregiver for the time being."

"I am not legally his mother. The tribe hasn't accepted me, or rejected the children."

"They have left you in the position of caregiver."

No need to argue with Keama. She was likely right. Ancestrally, adoption could be as simple as not sending a newcomer away, or in this case, no one taking the children from her. "He already has an Indian name. So he needs his legal name."

"Yes. Do not say it before the right time in the ceremony."

"Maja, what about me? I don't have an Indian name."

Terra paused. This is all happening so fast. What name would fit Amanda Dianna? She is strength, hope, everything anyone could dream of in a daughter. Am I the right person to do this?

"She is old enough to choose her own name. In fact, at four, it is often their first chosen name. However, Amanda Dianna, you must not speak it until the point in the ceremony when you are asked to speak your new name." Keama handed the girl a bunch of braided herbs.

Terra's phone rang. She almost dropped it, while trying to answer. "Hello?"

"Terra, it's Janet. Where are you? I tried to follow your directions."

"Where are you?"

"In a circle of four houses. Are you sure cars can fit in here?"

Terra looked out the open door. The car Janet had to be in was turned around in the middle of the further housing cluster, and pointed toward the walking path to the school. She laughed. "We aren't hard to find. You drove past us. Come back to the opposite side of the village."

"I don't think I could walk that far. All the houses look alike. Are these dogs safe?"

"We will walk back. It'll be a few minutes. Ignore the dogs."

"I'll be back later Keama."

Keama nodded and turned to unbraiding some herbs strings.

Terra picked up Little Rock, and took Amanda Dianna's hand for the short walk home.

What will Janet see? I, who have never been closer than three feet to any other person, holding a child's hand, and carrying an infant who wants to be a toddler.

Why should I care what she thinks?

For the first time in my life, what other people think of me matters. Somehow, it is important for people to see me as I am. Whoever I am.

She saw Janet before Janet saw her. Poor thing cowered in her car with the windows rolled up. Two dogs sat on Terra's porch waiting on a snack. They knew how to play strangers. "Janet, come on out and into the house."

Janet's jaw dropped.

"What's wrong. What do you see?"

"Something crossed my mind. You look like you belong here. How you manage the weather, and lack of city life,

is beyond me. It must be boring out here. There aren't even any trees."

"It's full of life. I go to bed at dark, tired every night. I sleep solidly, and wake well rested in the morning."

"That dog will bite the poor child!"

Little Rock had pulled himself up onto the side of one sleeping dog. This mother dog had pups somewhere. Right now, she turned and licked him in the face.

"He's safe. We do close the doors at night so the wild dogs can't come in."

"I was surprised to see children with you."

"Well, I haven't been good about keeping up with my emails. I am sorry. I am helping raise Amanda Dianna and Little Rock."

Janet handed her the papers.

Terra looked them over. This apartment was almost her last material connection to Boston. Her fingers tightened on the pen. She signed her name. "Here are the signed papers for your daughter. I guess she can keep anything I haven't put into storage. There is nothing there I need or want. Maybe you should sell everything in my storage unit, and close it too."

"You really plan to stay, don't you? What happened?"

"This place feels more like home than anywhere I have ever been. I belong. They need me."

She tucked her pen into her hair. "And I need them."

"What about all of your books? And your collections?"

"Sell them, and send the money to. No, wait. Auction everything to the highest bidder." Terra hastily scribbled something on a scrap paper, and handed it to Janet.

"Send it there. I will need it soon."

Amanda Dianna hadn't said a word.

This strange woman moved woodenly around the tiny house. Janet's eyes watched for every imagined danger in every spot she could see.

"It's okay, life is nice here. You might not like it. You have to live your life. Maja is here to live now."

Janet stared at the child. Then she grabbed the papers, and ran to her rental car. "Please be safe Terra. You can always call me." She spun the tires as she turned and flew into town.

Chapter 15

The community gathered before dawn in front of Keama's home. Normally, the first rays of the sun must touch the newborn's head on their naming day. Even though this day was a few months late for this child; the spirit would still be honored.

The first glint of light appeared on the horizon.

Keama stepped out of her home, followed by Terra carrying the boy. Amanda Dianna trailed behind, close beside her chosen mother.

"May I address the gathering of the spirits this morning." Keama spoke. The slight murmuring stilled. A baby's cry broke the silence.

"May the spirits of the four winds, the earth, the heavens, the past, present, and the future recognize this child. This boy was giving the name 'Little Rock' by his birth mother. He has no legal name. What is his chosen mother's name choice for this child?"

The first rays of sunshine peeked over the horizon, searching for somewhere to land.

"As his second mother, he must choose me later of his own free will. His legal name will be Logan which means 'Little Hollow'. His village name will remain Little Rock." Terra held Logan up as high as she could. The sunshine rested on his forehead.

His giggle broke the silence.

Terra pulled him back down to her arms. The villagers seemed pleased with her choice.

Keama raised her arms. "Today is also a special day for this boy's big sister. She has chosen her first Indian name. May the spirits of the four winds, the earth, heavens, past, and future recognize this daughter by her chosen name."

Amanda Dianna stepped forward. "I choose to be called 'Yanna' which means 'friend.'"

A few people laughed.

"Of course, my chosen mother cannot call me friend at my age. So I expect she will continue to call me by my legal name. If I keep this name into adulthood; may I be worthy to be called 'friend' by my chosen mother."

The village gathered closer, as if to hold the three women and young boy as close to their hearts as possible.

It meant more to Terra than anything else at the moment, to see how fondly they all looked at her, the children, and their leader.

"Please return this evening for a short announcement. For now, those of you who are preparing to start the home of Bea and Bran, go." Keama held her arms up into the welcoming daylight.

Chapter 16

Mounds of dirt, piles of lumber, a haystack, and cattle watering troughs awaited the adults and children who gathered to begin house building. All these separate things would become a sturdy home.

Her home was built of hay and mud. It seemed so different from the loose pieces being picked up by the light breeze, and blown away.

Terra watched the group. Many, like her, did not know where to begin.

Vasa's husband arrived and spoke to the children near the haystack. "We have to build the wooden frames for the bricks. While we are doing that, pick your favorite items you want Bea and Bran to remember you by. Bring two with you next Saturday."

"What can we bring?"

"Arrowheads, painted pottery, anything that is special to you, that you want to share with Bea and Bran forever."

The children raced down to the stream to play and discuss the treasures to share with Bea and Bran.

Terra walked to the brick mold building. "How many molds do we need?"

"There are at least 30 adults, and 20 children to help. The children will have to be two to a mold, due to size. We should make 60 molds, I think," Bran said.

Bea waved at Terra. "Come help us cover the dirt and straw with tarps."

Terra hurried over and grabbed one end of the flapping blue plastic. "We don't want it to blow away. Do you think we will prepare any bricks today?"

"A few. A practice run as soon as the first few molds are complete."

The sound of tires on the rough earth broke through the sounds of children splashing in the stream. A small truck struggled to rise over the hill. Once it stopped, a tall dark haired man stepped out of the driver's seat.

"Hi, I'm looking for someone. Though I don't know exactly who," he said.

Shanna stepped forward. "How can we help you?"

"It seems someone chose to sell an extensive collection of artifacts of various cultures. I could think of no better place to bring them than here, to this small village of mixed cultures."

Terra stared. It couldn't be. He did look familiar. Surely, it wasn't her collection. She stepped up beside Shanna. "I did ask for my collection to be auctioned off. I almost wish I could have brought it here instead. Though there is no place for it here."

"I have the catalog. You can check to see if it is yours," the man said.

The group turned back to their work.

Terra walked to the front of the truck to see the papers in his hand. She sensed, more than heard, the giggle behind her. She almost blushed, realizing that these people knew nothing of her, only of her life since she came here.

The man held out his hand as she stared at him. "My name is Monty. I am an antiques dealer, and thought this collection was quite impressive. I had no idea I would see you here. I don't even know your name."

Terra looked through the stack of auction papers. "What did you hope for, by bringing them here?"

"I tried the local museum. They said they already had too many exhibits. I try to find homes for things where people will value them, and their cultures." Monty tried to look into her eyes.

She refused to look up.

"Do you have them with you?"

"Yes, under the tarp. Would you care to see?"

Terra looked around. A few of the men were within yards of her, and one small child was only inches away.

"Shanna, come look with me."

Shanna ran over to the other side of the truck.

Monty pulled back the tarp.

There were all of her treasures. Jumbled together, much like the museum in town. They seemed so different now. More alive than ever. She reached out to touch a precious few.

Each story seemed more alive than when she first heard it. There was the pouch that held the newborn's placenta from one tribe. Cooking pots passed through countless generations, without a single crack. Blankets woven in another village, a special symbol in them tying two cultures together into a new one with a special marriage. Each representing so much more than what they appeared to be.

"You wish to sell these priceless treasures back to me, or the village?"

"They can't be sold," Monty said. "The person who auctioned them said they must be used to teach others the values forgotten by so many."

Terra had forgotten she had said that on her note. Or was that Janet?

"What do you want to do with them then?"

Monty smiled at her.

She stepped back.

"I don't bite." He laughed.

The villagers closed in around her and Monty. Pretending to work or talk, while really listening.

"Our village is poor. What did you bring them here for, if not to sell?"

Monty reached for the placenta pouch. "To share memories of many cultures with others, as you have. You are here. You need your tools and memories as well."

Terra stared at him. "I can make no decisions for the village. Or for the tribe as a whole."

"I am sorry to startle you. I merely recognized you from your pictures; having read many of your articles. Then, I saw the collection for auction, it could only be yours; and I feared for your safety." His eyes seemed to plead for something.

Amanda Dianna tugged her sleeve. Terra looked down and saw the concern in her chosen daughter's eyes. She reached for her to let her know she was okay.

The man gasped.

The villagers watched, not knowing what he knew.

"Let's go see Keama," Amanda Dianna said.

The whole group followed as Terra led the way.

Monty trailed behind her, papers in hand.

As they reached Keama's doorway, she stepped out into the sunshine.

"What brings you here?"

"Concern for your village, and an acquaintance I barely know. You have changed her so, from what little I know of her in airport waiting rooms."

Terra stepped back.

A power play shone between the eyes of Keama and Monty. Similarities between them jumped out. No one else seemed to notice, or portray any idea of what should happen next. Still an outcast here. There were so many forgotten things they knew. She could never learn them all.

"Come. Sit. There is no room in the house." Keama gestured to benches placed outside for the morning's ceremonies.

Unsure if she belonged here, at this moment, Terra backed up.

Amanda Dianna pulled her forward.

They pulled a bench up in front of Keama and Monty.

"You have aged well Grandmother."

Keama's eyes sparkled with emotion. "You have never called me that. What really brings you here."

"I have no idea what made me see that auction. It must have been the look on a young child's face as she chose this young woman to be her friend on her flight here. She seemed terrified of the child. I knew her by name only through her writings, and had never spoken to her."

"Are you going to take her away from us?"

Everything swirled around Terra.

"Only if she asks me to."

"And if she stays? What demands will you ask of her for the return of her collection if she so desires?"

"For some reason the auction house wasn't doing well that day. I bought them for nearly nothing. I would gladly give them back to her if she wished. To see her happy smile."

"Maja can keep them in our basement until we can find room in the school," Amanda Dianna said.

Monty turned to her. "How like that other child you are. Yet, so different, I can't even explain how. Are you happy here?"

"This is my home. If Keama is your grandmother this should be your home too."

"Sorry dear child. My mother left here while still a child with her father, wishing to find a place to make a living. I know nothing of the life here. She never brought me here,

even when she visited, as I had no interest. Maybe she should have made me come, once or twice."

Keama looked at the grandson she did not know. "You have been successful in your part of the world. You come now, to see me at the end of my days."

"You have been successful in your own way, Grandmother. I wish I could be as successful. If my coming now brings trouble, I can leave."

A community decision seemed to be made without words. Oh, to be part of something so secret and strong! She had often seen it in action, though had never been a part of it.

"Monty, as the head of this village, for the time being, I will say, we would value these artifacts. We do not have any financial means to pay for them. You of all people know our circumstances. I wish you could have found what your grandfather searched for all those years. I have waited for you to come. I know now, I have waited almost too long."

"You can have them. I still search for Grandfather's answer. Perhaps, if all those who left this village had left together, and searched together, we might have found it."

"Or simply found our village in a different place, with a different lifestyle." Keama's eyes flashed with strong feelings of this eternal argument.

"You never remarried after Grandfather's death."

"I never saw his dead body, or recognized his spirit. It is also not frequent for a spiritual leader to marry when she has a busy life here. Perhaps too busy without the helpmate she had always dreamed of, who once was."

Shanna moved behind Keama into Terra's vision. "Let us put the past behind us, as far as this relationship goes. What is broken cannot always be healed. What is healed

may be re-broken. As a village, what will we do with these artifacts?"

Terra tried to listen to the village chorus around her. Voices faded as Keama and Shanna's words repeated over, and over. Instead of being part of the decision making process about her once belongings, the ones she held so dear, and hoped to sale to help her new friends, she wandered off on her own, in a direction she had not previously traveled.

As the fog in her brain started to lift with no resolution in sight, she realized there was a hand holding hers. Her daughter waited patiently beside her. Ready to lead her back to the village, no longer in visible in the distance.

"Maja, Logan needs you. We all need you. Some don't know it."

Terra smiled at the child and squeezed her hand. "Let's hurry back to meet them before they worry about us."

Chapter 17

The circle of benches in front of Keama's home was empty. The truck was no longer on the hill above the village. A deafening eerie silence pervaded the village. Not even a dog was in sight.

"Come in, and close the door behind you," Keama said.

Terra took a deep breath, squared her shoulders, and walked in.

Beside Keama was a younger woman, though still more than a generation older than Terra herself. The woman's posture demanded almost as much respect as Keama.

The new woman held her head high, and seemed to see every aspect of both Terra and Amanda Dianna. The child shivered as her hand clasped tighter. With no room on the bed to sit, she went toward the table to move it under the dried vegetation so they could sit on the floor.

Amanda Dianna looked up at her, emotions dancing in her eyes as she let go to help move the table.

"Grab a blanket over there to sit on. Bring the basket under the tea leaves," Keama said.

Terra looked into the basket. She wasn't surprised to see religious artifacts. They were like many she had seen in villages around the world. A few were obviously ancient. The rattle on top had decorations of likely a pueblo tribe, while a bone flute looked decorated in more of a woodland style.

"Even this basket symbolizes our mixed culture in this village. We are preparing to add more to it." Keama took the basket and passed it to the new woman.

"This is my friend, Wayra. Actually, my friend's apprentice. I never trained an apprentice; hoping my

grandson would come home." Keama fell silent and looked at the closed door.

"I have already chosen and mostly trained my apprentice. He is doing well. Almost your age, and with a little guidance via phone or email, he will do fine." Wayra clutched a bundle of herbs in her hand.

"Are you here to stay?" Amanda Dianna asked. "Will you replace our Keama?"

A sound, not quite a laugh, snuck from both older women.

"No child. No one can replace her, in body, spirit, or mind. I am here to meet her chosen successor. To help train her, so that a line will continue here, and keep the village alive."

Wayra bent forward to look at Amanda Dianna more closely. "You are young. Wise for your years, the village all say."

"I have watched after both of my mothers, and my brother. Where is he now? Did he go home with Shanna?"

"Only now thinking of him?" Wayra had an odd twinkle in her eyes. "I heard the coyotes howling a bit ago."

Amanda Dianna jumped to her feet.

Keama motioned for patience.

"Don't worry. He is safe with Shanna. You had a more important concern." Wayra watched Amanda Dianna closely, as the child relaxed. "You are young still. Though, your chosen name says much about you."

"I hoped it would. I am trying hard to make friends. Now that my Maja is more comfortable here. Maybe with 'friend' for a name, people will see me as such."

Wayra reached out her hand to Amanda Dianna.

"Please child, will you allow yourself to be trained up to step into your Keama's shoes someday? You know, as we

all do, she won't be here forever. And she feels you are the most qualified, and able to train for her replacement."

The room spun. "Please don't take her away. She is only as much a tribal member here as I am."

As the words tumbled out of her mouth, Terra had no idea what effect they would have. They were the truest words she could say about her own feelings. Even so, she grabbed for Amanda Dianna to hold her back, close to her.

"I can't give you the look one would expect from such fear," Wayra said. "I know enough about you to know today has been traumatic. And to know, you have forgotten much that many will never learn."

Keama returned from her reverie. "She will stay with you, if she accepts. There is much she already knows. You still need her, and she still needs you. There is plenty of time for her, though not for me."

Tears rolled down all their faces at those words.

Keama and Wayra waited on Terra. Could she give up, even a little what she had so recently found? "When would her training begin?"

Keama reached out to touch her shoulder. "Her training began the first day she came to my home. Do you see other children here?" She waved around the room.

This was probably not a place a normal child would visit, or come to play.

"They come to the door, and beg me to come out. She, Yanna, comes to me. Brings me things I need, and has already learned how to assist in childbirth, and death ceremonies. Many young apprentices her age haven't spent near as much time, or energy learning."

"Maja, can I? I want to, though it will be ages before anyone will respect me as much as they do Keama."

Terra looked at her new daughter. The only true blond in the room. How out of place she would feel among all those dark headed children in the school? "Your life has been so different. Have you forgotten where you were two years ago? Do you think you can bridge the gap, and fit in here?"

"Terra in this village of mixed backgrounds, anyone can fit in. You are proving that far more than she. Children can be accepted anywhere. I saw your eyes today. I could see your feelings, even if no one else could. I want you to learn what you can too, if only to support your daughter in her future role." Keama spoke.

There seemed to be a something coming from somewhere else. Some other sound, someone else, trying to help Terra find the words for her feelings.

"Listen to the spirits when they talk. They can hear you. You can hear them if you listen close enough." Wayra's voice said, without moving her mouth.

"I will try to learn. I have seen many other cultures. So, will try to blend in here more than I have already."

"Maybe blending with what is here isn't all of the answer. Maybe creating a new dream for everyone, not only you is the answer."

The women and child watched her.

A sudden sound of joy and surprise from Amanda Dianna brought her out of her trance. "Did you hear? Who was it?"

Terra looked at her, "I thought I heard Wayra speaking."

Wayra shook her head. "I heard my mother saying soothing words."

Keama smiled. "Terra, you are blessed. Now you can bless us."

"My momma said I can do anything." Amanda Dianna squeezed her hand.

A dog barked at the door.

"I guess it is evening already. Everyone should be here for the announcement. Do we all agree?" Keama asked.

"Yes!"

Terra and Amanda Dianna stood to help Keama up.

Wayra carried the basket as she followed them to the door.

Amanda Dianna opened the door to the whole village standing below them. As she stepped out, a ray of sunshine touched her golden hair.

Keama stepped out, and her wrinkled face smiled, as if it could never frown.

Terra stepped forward.

"Today has been a day for ceremonies. That hasn't changed. Though, many things have changed today, this has been coming for a while." Keama stepped back.

Amanda Dianna stepped in front of Keama so the older woman could rest her hands on her shoulders.

"This child, Yanna, will be my apprentice. She, and her Maja, will learn from me, and my friend, Wayra."

Terra stepped carefully around them both to stand beside Amanda Dianna as Wayra stepped beside Keama.

Wayra held the basket up high for everyone to see. "In this basket are ritual objects handed down from every generation of healer in this small community, and where they came from. There are pieces, from tribes all over this country, and back through the centuries. There has always been a healer for a tribe whom was different from all others. This basket will be passed to Yanna. And she will place something of significance from her to nestle among these artifacts."

A slight murmur sounded in the crowd. Terra couldn't make out who it was, or what they were trying to say.

"I, Yanna, will do my best to learn. All cultures are melting pots. We have our own unique culture here. I will plan and prepare to be a spiritual leader if my new family so desires."

"Does anyone object?" Keama asked.

Terra knew this was only a formality, and hoped no one responded.

Little Rock, now Logan, struggled to be out of Shanna's arms.

Monty stood in the back of the crowd.

No one spoke, though someone still murmured.

"If no one objects, her training will begin now." Keama held her hands up to the setting sun.

Wayra passed the basket to Amanda Dianna.

Amanda Dianna took the rattle in one hand, and a tiny woven cloth in another, and began to circulate into the crowd.

The group moved on to the benches to sit, eat, and talk over the day's events.

Terra stood back, taking it all in. Everyone seemed to be giving her space again. Waiting to see what she would do.

Logan crawled up to her.

She picked him up and turned to face Monty.

"We did what they suggested and put the artifacts into your crawlspace."

Terra hesitated. "Thank you. I am surprised you are still here."

"I agreed to stay the night. I have a tent. I haven't camped in a long time."

"Well, I better find food for me and my son. It is nice to finally have a name to put with the face I used to see so

often." She hurried to join her friends. If only they were her family.

Monty stared at her.

She turned back when Keama appeared.

Keama walked up to him. "Grandson, you won't give up your world for her, and she won't give up her world for you. Maybe a year ago, not now."

"You were always right Grandmother. I am sure you are now. I believe I should try." He turned and walked off into the night, all alone.

In the circle, lit by a small fire, Shanna sat with a space saved beside her.

Terra sat down beside her.

"Terra, you don't know how to speak to a man."

Terra looked at her in surprise. "What do you mean? I am short, sweet, and to the point."

"Exactly. You talk like a man. So they don't know what to think. Did you never laugh and giggle with female friends when you were a teen?"

"No." Terra didn't like to remember those days. "I didn't have any friends then. Did you?"

"Well, you do now, or you will. If you don't scare them all off." Shanna giggled. "Smile and have some fun tonight. Listen. Speak to everyone."

Shanna watched her all night as she made an effort to speak to everyone, and thank them for accepting her daughter. Surprisingly, even Vasa seemed friendly. It still gnawed at her that she herself was not accepted. Actually, she didn't know what she had to do to be adopted by the village. Fear that the tribe could now take her children away from her pushed her to open up more than ever.

Chapter 18

Terra stepped out early the next morning to view the landscape. Several thoughts from the night before had disturbed her short sleep. Among them had been the almost accusation that she could, or would, leave this place. Even though she didn't fit in, she belonged here.

A warning bark disrupted her.

Monty walked towards her, with a water cup.

"Good morning Terra, I hoped you were up. Maybe we can work on some ideas."

Terra hesitated, unsure if she wanted this stranger to be in her life. She owed him for saving her collectibles.

"Sit on the benches. I can bring water outside."

He settled down comfortably in a spot with little shade.

"I thought perhaps we could go through the boxes, and see which cultures you have represented," Monty said.

"I'd rather not have everything out in the sunlight.

Though all the items are intended to be used, the sun can fade them. We can go through my catalogue. It has pictures and descriptions of everything. Except items I have picked up here. I can go find that, and be back in a few minutes."

Sorting through the catalogue could take all day. Not that she had anything planned. The children had not woke up. It would better to start this project without them seeing her feelings.

Memories of every tribe she had visited would be laid bare in front of this stranger. The unknown grandson of Keama.

The various cultures had shared their information, their food, even their hopes and dreams. She had never been invited to live with, or become a member of any these ancient tribes still in existence today.

Alaska had been one great summer and fall. Her first for reporting on ancient cultures vanishing as their livelihoods disappeared. Or, how their cultural existence became illegal due to human overpopulation, over fishing, and fur trapping. In that first village, their only memories were of seal trapping for fur and food. Now, their way of life was not allowed because of the scarcity of seals. There was nothing else left for them. No way to farm on the frozen tundra. Their seal artifacts would be illegal if they couldn't prove they were from animals captured before the ban. Even if the ban lifted for their tribe only, there weren't enough seals to sustain them.

Actual museum quality artifacts, bone knives, hide scrapers, and a mini replica hut from whalebone could be seized by officials. She had also saved many recipes from this dying culture. Recipes so specific, she could almost taste the different kinds of seal stew in her mouth. Each distinct in taste and texture, they appeared so similar on paper. Try as hard as she could, she could not explain it to Monty.

He listened. The wealth in the catalogue glimmered in his eyes. "What other cultures do you have?"

Next, she had surveyed the Native American cultures. Visits to Washington State, both Woodland tribes, and Oceanic tribes. So similar, and so different. They complimented each other well.

The following year, she had studied and collected from a few of the Plains tribes in the Dakotas. Here, she had learned some rarely known stories. Some deemed to be ancient, were more recent than perhaps people realized. Vocalized stories that hadn't been written could be influenced over the generations. Some of these stories showed strong sign of those outside influences.

There was the year in South America. Janet had really missed her then. "Imagine, so many of the animals we call pests, and others we call pets, were often the staples in these people's diets. In fact, early explorers often didn't realize what these people ate for meat, since they didn't have cattle or sheep."

"Can we contact some of these people? Are their villages at stake too?"

"Oh yes. All villages are at stake. The world is in turmoil right now, as people who have lived a simple life off the land, often find the land, and their few resources gone. Then they are left with nothing. No money, or skills, to live in the modern world."

"Where else have you been?"

"There was the year in Africa. One could spend a lifetime in Africa and never meet all the tribes there. For example, a few tribes believe that to eat one elephant a year will bring them wisdom and luck for the upcoming year. Of course, this is illegal now, so they lose an important part of their religion and lifestyle, and the whole village falls apart."

Terra pointed to the catalog list from Africa.

"Even if three villages on the continent hunted and ate one elephant per year, it would not affect the elephant population, if trappers didn't take thousands illegally. The sad thing is, the trappers take the ivory tusks and leave the elephant dead, and they don't even share the meat with the hungry. Whereas, the tribes used every speck of the elephant. One tribe believed burying one vital organ, I think it was the heart, was part of the good luck in their religion. Even then, it gave back to the Earth." She pointed to picture.

"Half their tools and homes are made of now illegal substances. Centuries old trained craftsmen and

craftswomen cannot support themselves any longer." There were pictures of one village that had been raided by the government for their ivory home supports. Terra had watched the government officials rip down homes made of elephant tusks hundreds of years old. The villagers had been left with no homes, and no way to build new ones.

"See this?" The picture was of a lion's head. "A group of hunters found this dead lion near the road. They were starving. They thought they could take an already dead lion home and have food for their families, the mane for religious purposes, and fur for a blanket. The government caught them, and gunned them down calling them poachers." Her voice shook. One of those hunters had smiled at her only an hour before his murder.

After the year in Africa, a year in India seemed tame. Some of the road and building pictures brought back memories. She had even managed to pass herself off as a man a few times when necessary to protect herself, though foreign visitors were usually left alone.

Terra moved on to Europe, not many ancient cultures left there. Some groups were trying to revive dead, or nearly extinct, ways of life. There had been speculation about some aspects, it had been a fun adventure.

A few weeks in Russia and China had given her a different perspective on what it took to survive in modern cities, as well as the tundra. Isolated villages in both countries were often forgotten, neglected, and unknown by most people.

At last, she came to Australia. "Australia is a lot like here. Aborigines are shuttled off to reservations, have strong reactions to alcohol, and unless they leave the reservations, there is little chance of making ends meet. They, like here, are the forgotten people. A people pushed

aside who have not found a way to hold onto the past, and step into the future, with both still in their hearts."

Australia, a warmer continent with animals mostly unknown to science, though well known to the ancestors of the original inhabitants. "They are so different, each group in its own way. Their stories are full of hopes and dreams, mostly of the past. It almost seems as if they think today is a bad dream they will wake up out of. Look at the artwork."

Artwork and pictures of instruments documented much of what she had seen. Terra dreamed of being on the beach, listening to those instrument sounds once again during a sunset. There was something so peaceful about the music. Slow songs lulled her to sleep on the beach many a night.

"I never made it to Hawaii, or any of the Polynesian islands. Who knows what we might find there."

Terra jumped as Monty's hand touched hers. "We could bring them all here. We could make a safe place for the ancient cultures that still exist."

Terra jerked away. "What and study them under a magnifying glass? No way. Plus, the cultures are dependent on their own landscapes and weather. Various things that simply don't exist here. Can you imagine trying to catch a seal in the desert?"

"You said their way of life doesn't exist where they are anymore either. They need hope. They need something. My mom never found what she was looking for."

"I'm sorry, Monty. I really am. I don't want to exploit them that way. It's bad enough taking pictures. Some tribes still don't allow outsiders to see, or remember their private ceremonies. Of course, those ceremonies will likely be forgotten completely in the next generation or two. That is their choice."

"Is it? You, like me, are of mixed cultural backgrounds. One culture came in and pushed their ideas on the other. Should we allow a culture to die, and all their wisdom with them because they refuse to share it with us? What if they have cures, technology, or something else we could all benefit from, and it dies?"

"That has happened millions of times in history."

"Yes, and the dying cultures either died in vain, or were forced to give up their secrets."

"I don't want to force them. If they want to keep the secrets, the great spirits have a reason. Let the secrets die, to be relearned when humans deserve them again."

Monty stared at her. "Now I know why my grandmother chose you. You think much like she does. If we brought only people who chose to share, to keep the truth alive."

"Whose truth? Your truth? My truth? Their truth? See that's the problem! We can't know what's true anymore. It's all been watered down by perception and stereotype. How do we even know if this is the way it was? Or the way they expect us to expect it to be."

"I think you expressed the argument well," Shanna walked up. "Well enough the whole village can hear you shouting."

"Sorry Shanna. I'm really emotional right now. No idea why."

"Go bring me some water, please." Shanna sat down beside Monty.

Terra walked into her home in a daze, not even beginning to sort through the feelings streaming through her mind. She wanted to help these people. Not exploit them. Or, was all paid employment exploitation?

Walking back out with the fresh water jug, she saw it different. An outline of the situation, not the whole solution.

Terra filled a cup for Shanna, then refilled her own, and Monty's too. "How could it work? We'd merely make a zoo of ancient cultures, or a living museum. Something no one believes is really real. Then, they'd go home at night, glad they don't have to live that way anymore."

"We would have more tourism. People want to study ancient languages and cultures," Shanna said.

"There are ancient culture classes taught at most universities," Terra said.

"Yes. They are taught by professors taught by book learned professors themselves. Current professors have never lived in those places, or village style lives. They think they know the languages and cultures. Do they really?" Monty said.

Terra chuckled. "I lived in many of them, and even though I think I know what a few words in a few languages mean. There is no way I would try to teach about foreign cultures."

Shanna reached for Terra's hand. "You have lived in them, ate there, slept there, seen births, weddings, and funerals in many cultures. Really been there, not only watched a documentary on television, which is all many of those professors have seen."

"Do you think this could work? How would it work? The people I know wouldn't want to leave their families, their ancestors, and their land behind."

Monty shifted in his seat. "We need lots of skills. We need your ability to communicate." He held up his hand. "You communicate in language beyond language. Even I've seen it. People trust you. Maybe because you don't trust them. You have contacts everywhere. I have money to bring them here. Others who have left here will have important skills too. We need builders of all kinds,

teachers to help our distant teachers who come to visit or stay. We need finance managers, all kinds of people."

Shanna gripped Terra's hand. "We can't do it without you both. I was hesitant at first. Now, we can weave the fabric of our community back together."

"Will it be strong, or weak? Who would come to our university? Merely other intellectuals? What good would it do? Will it give people here jobs and hope?"

"I think it will do many things. We will be like the United Nations of Cultures. People will come to share, and learn from each other. More will come to find parts missing in their daily lives. Yes, tourism will be a big draw. So too will learning sustainability from multiple viewpoints."

"I can't make this decision, and neither can either of you." Terra glanced at Monty.

"Only Keama can make this decision. We should go to her now if you really want to think seriously about it."

Shanna and Monty stood up and both reached a hand out to Terra.

Out of habit, she ignored them.

Shanna glared at her.

Instead, she reached one hand to both of them as she tried to stand up without pulling on either.

Both smiled as they all turned to walk towards Keama's home.

Chapter 19

Amanda Dianna stretched herself awake.

Little Rock rolled over in his basket.

Maja and the noisy stranger talked outside.

She stood up, already dressed for the day, and woke Little Rock. She bundled him up and walked out the door, going around the corner quietly so Maja wouldn't hear them.

Her chosen mother had decisions to make today. For her own life, and everyone in the village. Adults had spoken words last night they thought she hadn't heard. She had. Best to let Maja make the decision herself.

Little Rock kicked. Others would call him Logan now, at least as his legal name.

Amanda Dianna reached the spiritual leader's home, and stopped before knocking on the closed door. The excitement of the day before was wearing off. She nearly feared the task she had agreed to take on. Her foot lifted to the first step.

The door swung open.

Wayra stood with the empty water jug. "Come on in Amanda Dianna. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Amanda Dianna walked in and settled Little Rock under the hanging vegetation. "Keama, will the training be long and hard?"

Keama held out her arms to give Amanda Dianna a hug. "Long yes. Not too hard. Repetition makes it easier, and there is much to remember."

"Is my brain big enough to hold it all?"

Keama laughed and held out the bowl beside her. "This bowl can only hold so much water, right?"

"Yes."

"Well, it can also hold lots of things besides water, right?"

"Yes."

"What happens if you put bread in the water?"

"The water soaks up in the bread."

"Well, Amanda Dianna, your brain is like the bread, it can soak up all kinds of information. Use it regularly, and you will likely never forget it. The hardest things to remember are the ceremonies you may only perform a few times in a lifetime. Those you must practice in your head from time to time, so you don't forget them."

"How well do you know Wayra?"

"She is younger than me, by a generation. She is a good teacher. As her second student, you will benefit from her former mistakes."

"Did I make that many?" Wayra walked through the open door.

"I don't know of any. We all make mistakes." Keama said. "Wayra, tell a little about yourself. Then let Amanda Dianna tell you her story."

"I was a bit older than you when chosen, and had no idea why, or what I was chosen for. You see, I had never been to a spiritual leader before. We didn't even live on the reservation. We lived miles away, and I went for a school project. One of those 'get to know your ancestors' projects."

Wayra busied herself washing dishes, while Amanda Dianna settled comfortably, listening to all the aspects of the story.

"My parents were proud of their heritage, and believed I should know more when I was old enough. My first meeting with the spiritual leader, Keama's friend, sealed my fate. She knew that day I was the replacement she was looking for."

"Keama, was I the first you saw and knew?"

"Yes dear child. I held out hope too long that my grandson would come home. We had kept in touch through letters and phone calls all through his childhood. He was too busy to ever come for his promised visit. I held off looking anyway. When I met you, I felt hope for the first time in years. I knew I had to find you a teacher."

"I will do my best for you Keama."

"No, child. Do your best for you." Keama paused as she touched the blanket on her bed.

"This is something you have to be selfish about. Even though we want our spiritual leaders to be respectful, and care for others as their top priority, remember, if you don't enjoy it, and don't take care of yourself, you will not be a true and wise leader."

"You must do it for you, for your people, and for your teachers. Not one alone, it is a triangle, or a circle, as they all come together as one," Wayra said. "Now, tell me your story. Who were you before you came here?"

"I barely remember. I was a typical city kid. Stuck in buildings with a television and toys. I don't miss that!"

"What changed it?" Wayra asked.

"Momma was excited. She went to see her doctor. I played in the waiting room while the desk lady watched me. Then we were going to meet Daddy for lunch."

Amanda Dianna stopped and went to check on her brother, to hide the tears on her cheeks. "He ran across the empty street. Daddy never made it." She couldn't stop the tears.

Keama reached out to comfort her. "Wayra, there was a high speed chase. Her daddy never could have seen the car. The driver never saw him. What she saw that day, no three-year-old should see."

"I saw his spirit leave his body as he lay there. My momma cried 'You can't go now!'"

Wayra waited.

"I don't remember much. Daddy's broken body was buried. Momma and I were alone." Amanda Dianna looked up into Wayra's eyes.

"Her parents were both orphans, so she had nowhere to go, and no one to turn to. Gina couldn't work because of pregnancy complications either. At first, her doctors thought it was the stress of the death of her husband."

"Momma had a bad cancer eating her up as the baby grew. Doctors said they could operate and save her life. It would mean giving up my brother. Momma said no. She was afraid of leaving me alone, she said."

"They said, even with the operation, the tumor could kill her in a matter of years. Gina called me, and I told her to come. Her great grandparents were members here once."

Amanda Dianna held the blanket on Keama's bed. "I remember them. She made me this. I use it now in memory."

"She? The mother?" Wayra asked.

Keama looked up. "No, Gina's great grandmother. I begged Gina to come to have peace while facing the decisions she had to make."

Noises outside grew louder. Almost shouting. No one came, other than the mother dog who liked to be near Little Rock.

"When they arrived, I could see their close connection. I wanted them to stay, and I agreed to help them find a new family for Amanda Dianna and the unborn child. Though of course, we have no empty homes, and no one has room for, or wants any more children."

Wayra nodded and hung up the dish towel. "What then. Where did you start?"

"I watched. She was such a young child. Too young of a child to understand what was happening, or so the world would say. I tried to find families that would have room for a quiet child."

"I remember that first family." Amanda Dianna sat beside her mentor. "Momma said she wanted an experienced mother. So, the first couple who came had ten children already, all adopted. They brought them all."

"Really? What happened?"

"They were so wild and out of control, Keama had to call the police to round up the children destroying the village, and send them away. It was obvious the parents had no intention of being parents."

"Were they all like that?"

"It was like that movie with all those nannies who didn't make it until they found the 'right' one. The next woman was sad."

Wayra sat back down to listen better.

"She came here to meet me and saw a scorpion on the steps." Amanda Dianna laughed. "She was terrified. She came into our one room, and screamed. Of, course, the dogs came running, and she climbed on the counter until I walked the dogs back out."

"What did Keama do?"

"She sent her on her way. She wanted to take me from my home then, and put momma in a hospital until the baby was born. She never even met my mother. How could I leave her before she died?"

Wayra reached to rest her lined hand on Amanda Dianna's head. "Do you miss your parents?"

"Of course I do! I know they aren't suffering or in pain. And really wouldn't want me to miss them." Amanda Dianna set her face to keep back the tears.

"Do you like your new mom? Is she good to you?"

"Oh, she listens to me, she takes care of me and my brother. What more can I ask."

"Is she more your mother, or more your friend?"

"I think at first, she was afraid of me. It was fun then to be her friend. Now, I need her as a mom though. She is trying."

"That's all we can ask. What is her story?"

Keama looked up at Wayra, then out the open door. "I think you can guess from her writings."

Wayra watched Keama then turned back to Amanda Dianna. "What were the other families like? Did you like any of them?"

"Oh Wayra, they were not hopeful. One lady came and wanted to adopt me. She was afraid momma would change her mind and keep us both. She kept talking about her partner. Her partner also had a woman's name."

"Did your mom not like her?"

"Momma said she might be okay. I was uncomfortable. She expected to see me and my brother. He wasn't born."

"What did Keama say?"

"Keama said she could come back later. The woman was afraid momma wouldn't give us both to her and her partner, so she left."

"That's too bad. She missed out on a great daughter."

"I hope she finds the 'right' daughter for her. Keama says it's hard for women who live together to find children who belong to both of them."

"I imagine so." Wayra said.

The mother dog moving slowly to escape Little Rock's grasp.

"The last family was the worst. They wanted to adopt, or thought they did. However, since we had no one to go back to if they weren't happy, they left too."

Keama smiled. "Afraid of commitment, or afraid of themselves, or how turbulent life is today, no one will ever know. As Little Rock was due to arrive any day, I convinced Shanna and the rest to allow the children to be adopted by the tribe. Though they would have no permanent home, no one could take this child I had grown attached to away."

"Momma begged Keama to try one more time. I am glad she did."

Little Rock crawled over to sit next to Amanda Dianna.

"Terra's background was what drew me to her. Shanna would read her stories to me over the years, and then again to Amanda Dianna and me. As we waited, we didn't know who the person behind the warm stories really was. Was that all she knew? Could she be really that happy living life without all the stuff of modern times?"

Wayra sat the teapot on the table as the group drew closer. "So you have suffered loss, not only of your own family. Also four other rejections in one short year. You have grown up too fast."

Keama lifted her cup to blow the tea cool. "Not only rejections. Attending to her mother as she died, caring for her infant brother, guarding the home, all kinds of things she shouldn't have to worry about. I'd like her to be a child again. We can't go back in time."

"I don't want to go back anyway. I am happy here with my Maja, and don't want to go to the city again. I barely remember it."

"What if she wanted to go?"

Keama watched her.

"No Keama. She might go visit her friend Janet. She will never live there again."

Tea was delicious. She had to convince the two women that she had to stay. Even if it meant the fear of training. Someday, she would be wise and revered as Keama was today.

The mother dog ran out the door.

"Wayra, I know you think I am young, and I am. I do want this. It gives me a future."

"You can still change your mind, many times in the next few years. I think you are smart enough. Maybe even ready to start in the direction you think you want to go. Now, go, spend some time with the other children. Learn how to talk and play with them. Leave your brother here. He'll sleep."

"I wouldn't be so sure."

Amanda Dianna stood up slowly and walked out the door.

Outside sat another young girl. A quiet one Amanda Dianna barely knew. She tried to talk to her. The voices inside continued.

"Amanda Dianna has learned a lot that adults have yet to learn," Wayra said.

"I know. You are right. First, she must learn to be a kid and communicate. If she can't communicate with those her own age, she will never be a great leader."

The girl seemed almost afraid of Amanda Dianna. She held out her hand, and they walked hand in hand.

It would be a tough journey. At least, she would have people she knew to help her along the way. Perhaps, Maja may not have that herself, as she rarely spoke of anyone other than her funny friend Janet.

Chapter 20

Terra and Monty rounded the corner of Keama's home. She bumped into the silent girl.

Amanda Dianna tripped and landed on the ground.

"I'm so sorry. I forgot about you. Are you okay?" Terra helped Amanda Dianna up to her feet.

"I'm okay. I told my story to Wayra. She thinks I need to be a kid again, and learn more too. It'll keep me busy, and that's great."

"I see you are making friends already," Monty said.

The other girl dusted herself off.

She appeared too shy to speak, or was it something else? She didn't smile. The silent girl held out her hand to Amanda Dianna.

"Della!" The shout came from somewhere far away.

"Della! Where did you go hide?" Dawna rounded the corner and almost ran into the child.

"Della, you worried me. You were supposed to stay nearby while I painted the spring and the wading tree."

The girl pointed at Amanda Dianna.

"Does she have something you want?"

Della shook her head, then drew a circle in the air encompassing the adults, and waved back to Keama's home. Then, she touched Amanda Dianna's shoulder, and pointed towards the group of children playing beyond the huts. She grabbed Amanda Dianna's hand and off they ran to join the crowd.

Dawna laughed as she watched them run. "That is the happiest I have ever seen her."

"Is she always so quiet?" Terra asked.

"Yes." Dawna shook her head. "The doctors think she can talk. She chooses not to. Della developed normally, even said 'momma' once. Then, after Falead left. That

doesn't matter. She seems to think we need to go see Keama."

"We were going there. You are welcome to join us. Shanna will be along in a few minutes," Monty said.

Little Rock sat beside Keama, nibbling on bread.

Keama handed him another piece of bread. "Good morning everyone. Come in and sit down. Tell me your dreams."

Terra and Monty looked at each other, trying to decide who should speak first.

"I'll speak," Dawna said. "I want to take my daughter to a specialist to find out why she doesn't talk."

Little Rock reached for the cup of water.

She pushed it toward him. "Who says she doesn't talk?"

"Has she ever said a word to you? She never speaks to others."

"She speaks, as this infant does. Della speaks in her own way. Everyone listens and responds. How do we not know if her form of communication isn't the better? Just because we can't understand, doesn't mean we can judge it."

"What hope is there in the world for a child who will not speak the way everyone else does? Even you didn't choose her for spirit work," Dawna said.

"Spirit work is not for her. She will find her voice. Then people will listen to her. Della is silent for a reason. She teaches us to listen inside ourselves, with our souls."

Keama turned to Terra. "Terra what have you and Monty been working on?"

"Should I leave?"

Terra glanced at Keama. "Dawna, stay, you can help us too. Maybe more than anyone. If Keama agrees, we

will need the help, and assurances of everyone here that they wish to be involved, and save our community."

Dawna settled more comfortably. "I am willing to listen. I don't know what help I can be."

Terra recounted the morning's adventures through her catalogs. "We will need so many things. So many people who want to try. We can't do it alone. We want to save this village."

Wayra spoke up from the corner she was resting in. "How can you save the village, without bringing the city to the village?"

Terra braided several loose plant fibers she had randomly picked up unconsciously. That was the problem. Either the village had to go to the city. Or the city to the village.

"That seems the most difficult part," Monty said. "As it has always been. How to hold onto tradition, how much tradition to hold onto, how much to let go. We can't all agree. I do hope we can all agree the village is worth saving."

The silence in the room voiced the consensus. "Keama, where can we begin," Terra whispered.

"It will be impossible currently. The university is a grand idea, and should be welcomed. However, our misfit village is on a reservation governed by a full tribe. They allow us to stay here. We have nowhere else to go."

"On the worst land in the reservation, or any nearby." Dawna made a sound like dog's growl.

"No one wants the mixed village, not even themselves," said Wayra.

"It's all part of the same problem," Monty said. "If your mom is from one nation, and your dad from another, you belong in neither." His large hands trembled in his lap.

"It wasn't always that way," Terra said.

Keama looked up. "No, once it could be a symbol of pride and strength to have mixed parentage. The best of both cultures. Now, it is seen as watering down, and losing both worlds."

"Who do we have to convince, and how?" Terra asked.

"You'd have an easier time convincing the tribal leaders to let us secede. Then, we'd lose what little income we have, and the right to the school." Dawna sounded defeated.

Monty's eyes sparked. He bounced on his seat. "Being independent might be part of the answer. Would we have a better chance, Grandmother, if we go in knowing what our plans are, or acting as if we are children without a plan?"

"Grandson, what is your plan?"

"We could go to the reservation council and beg to rule ourselves, and set up our own schools for the children within the university." Monty sat up straighter. "We can apply for government grants and rights on our own. It won't be easy."

Chapter 21

A sound at the door turned out to be Shanna. "So many would love to see you fail. You, and our whole village. They wait, expecting it to happen." She walked forward, closed the door, and sat down.

"My sister expects Monty to take Terra and the children away. Vasa hopes we never see them again. She doesn't think any of them belong here, any more than she does."

Warmth rose in Terra's cheeks. "It's not the blood that says where you belong. It's the heart, the mind, the soul." She wanted to stamp her foot. That wasn't possible, so she threw the braid down in front of her onto the dirt floor.

The braid looked odd. Not straight and even, made of several knotted pieces, different colors, different lengths, bound together.

Keama bent down and scooped it up. "This braid, a piece of brown, a piece of blond, and even green. What is its strength?" She grasped one end in each hand. "Monty, try to knock it down and separate it."

Monty tried to pull it out, push it down, and separate it by pulling on one strand. "I can't grandmother. It is stronger than only one fiber."

"So those of us who want to keep this village alive are strong. Many nations, many strengths. Now, hand me three of the smallest fibers over there, all identical please."

Dawna picked three of the brown fibers, a stained coarse grass, and handed them to Keama.

Keama quickly and neatly braided them together. "Now, Terra, try to separate these."

Terra pushed down on them, and they pulled down. She reached for one end and pulled a strand loose, though not out.

Keama nodded at her efforts. "You would think that wouldn't happen. After all it is a neater braid than your own."

Terra nodded.

"It is almost too neat, too perfect. The strands slip past one another and easily separate." She held it loosely now in her palm. The strands separated on their own. "You will face opposition like this. They only know one way of life. And that is all they see. Those who want us to fail have no plan either. They don't know what they want, though they think they do. You must find the way to unbind us from those who don't want to be here, and bind us to those who do."

Terra held out her hand to Shanna. "Vasa is your sister. If we succeed, she will fail, won't she?"

Shanna reached for Terra's hand and clasped it, then let go. She turned her head away before she said, "Vasa has already failed. She is miserable, and makes everyone around her unhappy. What she thinks is success is the real failure."

"Maybe she won't have to fail," Dawna whispered.

Everyone turned to stare at her.

"After all, she wants us all to have to leave, and to keep her family together. Maybe there is a way we can all have what we want. It may require moving, and bringing back everyone together."

Shanna relaxed. "What do you know?"

"Not far from another reservation, a small town has been going under. There are not many buildings there. There is a good sized hotel that hasn't been used since the tourist trade slowed down." Dawna's hands moved as she talked.

"We could live in the hotel, while we build homes. Then, restore the hotel into the university. We could buy the town."

"Where is it? How did you find out about it?" Monty said.

"It's about an hour south of here. A tiny hamlet that tried to be a mining town once. Later, it was an archeologist base site. Now, they even thought about a solar farm. They don't have any money left to pay the taxes, much less build the solar panels."

Laughter echoed outside the door.

Vasa opened the door.

Callie and a man stood behind her.

Vasa stepped into the tiny room. The pressure condensed, as if the walls were caving in. "You say you want to preserve our heritage, whichever heritage that is. You are forgetting a vital part. First, I have no idea where you think you will find the money to buy a building, or a town. Ownership is against our heritage. Maybe not against Terra or Monty's mixed heritage."

Monty shifted. "That is part of the question and answer, as for money."

"We won't take yours! You don't belong here. Take Terra, and those two children, and go." Vasa leered at him as if she were a cobra ready to strike.

Monty held out his hand to her. "Vasa, I am sorry. Please forget the past. Let's all build a future together."

"Vasa, even I know we can't take the children away. They have been legally adopted by the council. They now belong to the village and cannot leave unless the village chooses to abandon them." Terra watched the unknown man shift nervously behind Vasa.

Vasa ignored her words and continued to stare at Monty. "You need to leave the village, and take them with you. Your radical ideas aren't welcome here."

A cold, unrecognizable voice spoke up. "Falead, why are you here, and with her?" Dawna's stony face revealed far more than she knew.

The man stammered.

A whirlwind passed into the room. Della stood between the man and her mother. She held up one hand toward each. "Daddy come home. Momma stay."

"Della, come here," Monty said.

She walked slowly to Monty.

"This is a council for adults. Why aren't you playing with Amanda Dianna?"

"Broken families need binding. Amanda Dianna is whole now. She doesn't need me. Momma, Daddy, you, and Vasa need me." Della looked around the room at the emotional faces. "Let past troubles be in the past, and build us a future." Then, she turned and whirled right out of the room.

Silence built until Callie whispered. "Tell me your dreams."

Everyone looked around the room.

Vasa laughed again, half-heartedly. "Things aren't what you see. Good luck with my grandparents." She turned and stalked out the door.

Both Falead and Monty started to follow.

"Falead, we need to try to make it right for our daughter."

Falead sat beside Terra.

Monty left.

Callie settled onto the floor.

Wayra summed up the dreams for Callie. "So the question is, what do we do now?"

"Vasa will go to the council and tell them what she knows. It won't likely be approved. I like the university idea though. However, we could do it online, and not bring people here. Base it from here. We would need lots of computer operators for that. As well as many other jobs. I can work on it."

Terra watched all the faces as their thoughts drifted down many trails. "I think we can make the other idea work too. It will take time, and patience. We can build a solar farm plant and create the solar panels here. Our unemployed men and women can learn to install them on homes and businesses. Use them to create greenhouses to grow, prepare, and dry food. And share these ideas with others. This way, we receive the best of everything. We have an income, steady work, and preserve a valuable way of life on the driest land in the community. We can create our own gold mine on the leftovers no one wanted that they couldn't begin to build in other areas."

More people walked through the door and joined them.

"Our pottery and baskets will be useful again." Ren joined the rapidly filling circle.

"Can the solar panels be used to bake the food storage pottery?"

"What a fascinating story to create and tell to future generations," Una said.

Terra glanced at the newcomers.

"We saw Vasa storm out and thought we had better check on everyone." Una lowered her eyes.

Keama held up her arms, as if to gather everyone together into a hug. "So, now that we have a plan, who do we send to the council, and who shall speak?"

"I am an outsider here, so it should not be me," Terra said.

"I will speak," said Shanna. "I will introduce the ideas. Callie and Terra will answer questions; or anyone else as they see necessary."

"What about Monty?" Dawna said.

Everyone looked at Terra and Keama.

The silence was almost deafening.

Keama waved her hand to Terra to speak.

"I don't know him well, and would rather not include, or exclude him. I don't think the council would value his opinion, and probably not his money. I know nothing of what he does, has, wants, or needs."

Everyone nodded.

"When do we meet with them?"

"I will find out," said Shanna. "Likely in two weeks or so. Try not to worry. Work on your ideas. I will meet with you and Callie. We will need a fully-fledged business plan on both accounts."

Chapter 22

A scrambling sound awakened Terra.

"I can't find my treasure!" Amanda Dianna said.

"What treasure?" Terra asked.

Her daughter rummaged through every basket she could find.

"The arrowhead made at the museum. Plus, I had something else, special from my first mother for the bricks today." She ran to the trapdoor to search below.

Terra sat up slowly and rubbed her face. "Saturday already. I stayed up too late last night planning for the meeting next week."

Amanda Dianna popped out of the underground cupboard. "Yes, you did. It will all be okay. We will be with you."

"I don't think you will need to come. It's mostly for grownups."

"Who will watch us then? Don't you want to look like you include us?" Amanda Dianna looked hard at Terra. Finally, she grabbed one last basket under Terra's bed.

Terra reached for the basket and it dumped over. An arrowhead and a few precious beads tumbled out onto the dirt floor.

Amanda Dianna clapped her hands.

Before long, they greeted the morning sun on the walk to the wading tree.

Logan toddled along.

She held his hand.

He pulled her along, babbling.

Other families approached with lunch baskets and bulging sacks.

A small tent had been set up where Keama, Wayra, and another stranger waited patiently in the early morning.

Amanda Dianna dropped the lunch basket beside Keama. She then raced with her treasures to where the children were gathering to mix bricks. Her bounciness amid the flurry of activity was good for her.

Off to one side, well away from the mud, Vasa had set up her own weaving loom. Her son watched her. Nearby, Ren sorted different materials to create the baskets and rugs for the new home. Pamilla and Dawna set up the pottery and painting areas nearer the muddy area, as their crafts were messy too.

Terra walked to tent to leave Logan with Keama.

"Good morning Terra, hope your day is well. This is Yendan, Wayra's friend. She will teach the children and adults how to make beads for the wedding dress for Bea. She can only be here today."

"Welcome Yendan. I hope you enjoy the carnival atmosphere today."

The woman looked at the wiggling child at her feet. "I hope so. Maybe I should teach the adults. Beading isn't really safe for the children."

Wayra laughed. "Terra doesn't intend you to teach Logan. She is merely dropping him off."

She turned to Terra. "I have an idea. You will have to do some research. Why don't you order a few samples of different solar panel samples and let's use them to try to bake the bricks faster. Think you can find the right people?"

"I can try. There are a few different styles and systems."

"Join the children for today. They will have all the bricks made in no time."

Terra walked over to the mud covered children building bricks. The opportunity to stamp and play while mixing water, dirt, and straw didn't happen often. When the first batch was ready, she helped them scoop handfuls into the molds.

One boy was about to add his treasures deep in the center of the brick.

"Wait. You want them to be visible. Hold the treasures until the mold is full."

He smiled up to her, and filled the rest of the mold.

As the children filled a second mold, Dawna walked up with a few jars of colored sand. "Who would like to make a sand painting in your brick?"

Amidst the chorus of shouts, Dawna walked around as each brick was readied. She showed each child how to tap a little color into a small hollowed out area.

Amanda Dianna had placed the arrowhead in the center of her block surrounded by five beads. In the second, she had used the colored sand to create three rows, a white on one side and red on the other, carefully blended in the center.

"Maja, what do you think? The five beads represent our whole family. And the arrowhead what we hope to become. Of course, the colors represent who we are too. Are they pretty?"

Tears welled in her eyes. "Of course they are beautiful, and meaningful. Can you sign them, so everyone knows whose blocks are whose?"

Children scurried to find a way to sign the wet bricks. They returned with twigs and straw stems, to quickly write as well as possible in the unusual medium.

Dawna watched the excitement, and came back around to sprinkle more colored sand in each dug out name.

The children rushed to the stream to clean up before going to the weaving area.

Dawna came up to her. "That was a great idea. It will make them happy. Plenty of bricks were made today. Maybe we can make a few pretty sand painting jars for the soon to be couple."

"That would be nice. Thanks for helping today."

"I want us to succeed as well. I don't trust Vasa. She is up to something."

"I know. And I haven't seen Monty since he left the other day. Although I am glad. I wonder what she said to him."

"Here, carry one of these for me." Dawna handed Terra a vase of colored sand.

"I have no idea. We really can't paint anything else until the pottery is done. Only a few children went to the pottery section. It'll be next week anyway."

"I want to watch Yendan prepare the beads. Thanks again for coming."

Yendan showed how to make shell, bone, and amber beads. Fascinating to watch.

Noise from the children behind her increased.

A loud shout. Someone screamed in the weaving area.

Several children scattered.

Vasa chased after them waving the weaving shuttle.

Terra walked toward the loom to see what had happened.

Della sat next to the basket holding a small pile of colorful yarn.

"What happened?" Terra asked.

Vasa and a few children disappeared over the ridge.

Della looked up at her, picked up a stick on the ground, and pointed to the loom. There in the middle, what had

been a carefully designed circle was now closer to a trapezoidal shape.

"It can be fixed," Callie spoke from behind her. "Not sure why all the fuss. We always weave a flaw into our work. Striving too hard for perfection is something we should never do."

Vasa walked back, panting from her run. "I would rather choose where to put my own flaws, thank you."

"They aren't really flaws if they are planned." Wayra said.

Vasa stared at her, grabbed her bundles of colored yarns, and flounced off in the direction of her home.

"I think we should call it a day, and all go home. It's been so long since this community worked together. That they can only practice in short spurts at a time." Wayra walked back to the tent where Logan and Keama waited for her.

Chapter 23

Lizards raced across her doorstep.

Terra picked up her phone. "Janet, I need your help."

"What help do you need? I thought you were happy there."

"Sorry I haven't called or written. It's been hectic here."

"I imagine. Sunbathing and chasing wild dogs. What do you need?"

Terra rolled her eyes. This city friend would never see the complexities of life in a near desert village, or any village for that matter. "I need to locate different types of solar panels makers, and order a few trial sizes. I need them, and information packets, as soon as possible."

"Can't you research as fast as I can?"

"I'd like to. Really I would. I have one week to ship them here, and less than a week to try them out. During that time, I have to find the missing relatives of all of the villagers. About 200 people, and track their occupations, and contact each one personally."

"Sounds like you gave me the easy part. I can be on the project in an hour. Have them shipped to you at the village?"

"Yes please. Thanks so much. Hope you can come visit soon."

"I'll try. If you can scare the scorpions away." Janet laughed.

Terra placed the phone in her lap. "I don't even know where to start."

A suppressed laugh startled her.

Callie stood nearby. "Sorry, couldn't help hearing the desperation in your voice. I know a few tricks to finding people. I can access the tribal rolls."

"Great! However, which rolls would they be on? Can you find Bea's family?"

"Finding them, and communicating with them, are two totally different things. I'll access the information. You work on the letters. See you this afternoon."

Callie turned and left in a hurry.

Bea was a short distance away. She stood as if unsure whether to speak or not, then turned and hurried off.

Chapter 24

It took two days to gather all the materials she needed for the planning visit with Keama.

Amanda Dianna raced ahead of her and grabbed Della's hand.

Terra walked behind, holding on to the Logan as he stumbled on the uneven ground.

Amanda Dianna and Della rushed in Keama's front door, out of sight.

Callie and Shanna approached from around the corner of the cluster of homes.

"I think she's trying to make friends," Callie said.

Shanna laughed. "It's easy to make friends with the silent ones. Too bad she isn't trying one of the talkers."

Logan toddled to the girls and mother dog nestled with a new litter of pups in the corner under the dried vegetation.

"Hi Terra. Are you ready for the meeting?" Keama asked.

"I hope so. We find out now."

Shanna settled onto a braided rug. "What did you find out about the solar panels?"

"I have several pamphlets and brochures. I even received a few samples and will try them out. There isn't long enough to see if they will do everything we want. Long enough to know they create electricity."

"What about the missing members?" Callie asked.

"I have written to most all of them, and heard back from a few. Many would be glad to come back, if they believed there was any opportunity. The ideas intrigue them. Even Bea's family seemed receptive, though unsure that the plan would work."

Monty stepped into the home. "Hi. Sorry I haven't been here. I've been researching and working."

He settled down next to Callie.

She blushed.

Keama looked around the room, lingering on each eager face. "Well, it sounds like we have a plan to go to the council then. Let's go now while the plan is current in our minds." She carefully stood, and leaned on Monty.

Shanna had parked the school van nearby, so they could all travel together. The van had rusted paint, an odd colored door, and ripped seats.

"I've seen and ridden in worse."

Everyone glanced at her.

Terra hadn't intended to speak aloud. She smiled, jumped into the cab, and held out her hands to help Keama up to the seat. It would be long ride, as the governing village was in the center of the reservation, and Keama's village was on a distant outer edge.

Shanna drove slowly over the bumpy road.

Keama must feel every jolt at almost ten times the strength as everyone else.

Her hopes, while not great, were definitely positive. Something good would come, no matter what actually happened at the meeting.

The outskirts of the council village appeared on the horizon. It was much larger and more prosperous than the village she lived in. Sizes of the homes alone were double or triple that of the mostly one room homes in her own village. There were also many animals. Horses in pens, and even several small irrigated garden plots were visible from the road.

The council building was in the center of the village. Too many houses to park nearby. It would be a long walk

through all those tall, staring people in historical costumes.

"Have we interrupted a ceremony?"

"Not that I know of." Shanna parked the van as close as they could to the council building.

This meeting which would determine the fate of the smaller villages, as well as individuals.

Monty helped his grandmother down from the van.

At last, they began the long walk to the council. Along the way, the local children stopped playing to stare as they passed.

Amanda Dianna held her head high, and reached for Terra and Shanna's hands.

Della tried to hide behind everyone, until a small boy ran up behind her and tried to pinch her. She squealed, ran up to Callie, and grabbed her hand.

When the group reached the council doors, they all stopped and turned the full circle around, as if to see everyone, and see beyond them, to the hope of their dreams.

Outside was bright sunlight. Inside was a darkened room lit only by a fire. They could see little at first.

A little light peeked in through a window. Terra could barely make out a floor table. Several people sat on the opposite side, leaving the visitors with the door at their back.

Keama settled near the middle, while everyone else took seats on the floor around her.

Amanda Dianna pulled Terra towards one end, where one of the imposing people sat.

This person barely gave her a nod in greeting as she sat down.

A long silence occurred. Broken only by the rustling of clothes as people adjusted on the floor.

The man beside Terra spoke loud and clear. "You asked for an audience, please explain yourselves."

Keama looked around the room, trying to pick out each person as her eyes adjusted to the darkness. "We have come to request an opportunity we have found. We promise to follow whatever rules you set for us. As you can see, we have brought representatives from every age among the circle of our lives."

The man again spoke, firmly, and kindly. "What do you wish? We can make no guarantees."

Shanna spoke next. "Our wish is to be like preteens, to gain independence, while maintaining ties to our parents. Grandfather Honaw, please hear our call, we wish not to rise above you. Rather to find our place beside you, as your honored, respected child."

Silence again as everyone waited on someone to speak. No rustling, either outside, or inside.

"Granddaughter, please share with this circle your requests."

"Grandfather Honaw, I have brought two with me who must share their understanding of parts of this dream for our village. First, I will ask Callie to speak of the difficult task she has set herself."

Callie shifted as she sat up on her knees to raise enough to clearly see the circle members. "Grandfather Honaw, much like a child I come, asking to try something new, to keep the ancient alive. Please, do not give up hope. I dream of a day, when those who have been lost and scattered, can return to the homes of their youth. Many will return with hearts that belong to these homes, though have never seen their true home, as they were scattered as leaves on the wind. Please help them who wish to return and find where their hearts belong be able to do so."

Another council member spoke. "Hearts cannot return."

"They will find us in the great spider's web that has been created to reconnect the world. They will find the stories, the dreams, the hopes, and the beliefs where their true hearts belong. They will find us, and other villages, and return to them. Either in spirit, or in body, to rebuild that which has been lost. Please allow us to reach out to lost hearts and bring them home."

Grandfather Honaw sat quietly, not moving.

"Granddaughter Callie, you are wise and brave to ask such a request in this way. We will discuss this matter more in depth. Whose information do you choose to share?"

Callie let out a deep breath. "Grandfather Honaw, we will only share the information any given group is willing to share. As approved by their personal tribal council. Those who prefer privacy will be allowed privacy. However, some missing hearts may find them through the efforts of others. Hopefully, these souls will be accepted if they show the proper respect. If not, there is no more we can do."

Grandfather Honaw nodded. "Granddaughter Shanna, is there more to your plan?"

Shanna sat up to her knees to be visible. "Yes Grandfather Honaw. Our friend Terra has brought much knowledge to our village. She will be able to assist Callie in her project, as well as find others to help her on her own project. She will speak now."

Shanna sat down.

Terra tried to rise to her knees and realized, as an outsider, she had no idea the proper way to address this person. No one had discussed this. She hadn't planned to

speaking. She looked around the room, trying to find her courage.

"Grandfather Honaw, my Maja is shy. She listens."

A shocked silence filled the room.

Terra was shamed. "I am merely trying to think of the proper way to address the council members. However, I will follow your lead, unless someone objects?"

Terra glanced at every face, and barely saw a glint of a smile on a few. No one spoke.

She gathered her courage. "Grandfather Honaw, our village is on the edge. Up until now, we have been entirely dependent upon your village for every piece of food and clothing we have. We do not regret this. We wish to find a way to offer something in return. To find a way to provide for each other as equals, and not as a parent to a child."

Terra glanced around the room again. So far, so good. Deep inside her soul, the words came out, slowly at first. "Grandfather Honaw, we do not wish to turn the desert into a garden. That would not be the right answer. We do not wish to change the Earth. Merely to carefully use the resources loaned to us."

Again, she glanced at the impassive faces, waiting to hear her words. "Grandfather Honaw, we wish to use the sun, to bake our bricks, to grow food, and create jobs for our family members."

No one interrupted her. A good sign. "We have lost many members of our village over the years, as they have left in search of dreams that cannot be answered here. We wish to bring them back. Not to our village itself; as it could not quite sustain them. Rather, to their own village an hour away, to help build both of our dreams."

Terra stopped, the flow of words was gone. Her head felt heavy, and she wished to lay it down, though she could only lean forward.

Monty leaped up. "Grandfather Honaw, I have hope. I have dreams. We can make it happen, please agree."

Terra groaned at the outburst. They had worked so hard. Monty might destroy it all.

Grandfather Honaw spoke. "Children and Grandchildren, I can see your circle of life. Your hopes and dreams. We must think on these ideas for a few days. Come back when we decide."

"Thank you Grandfather Honaw." Keama rose from the floor.

Terra joined the others in thanking him. She rushed to Keama's side for her to lean on. On the trek back to the van the silent villagers watched them, as if they were unsure of what the small delegation might decide to do.

"Where is Della?" Shanna asked as they reached the van.

Terra turned back to glance along the people clutter path.

Della and Amanda Dianna emerged from the now almost out of sight council building, and broke into a run to catch up.

The two young girls caught up to the van.

Amanda Dianna and Della could have helped their cause by remaining, or have hurt it. She hadn't seen them in the dark meeting room, and thought they had left before she did.

"The children mean well. Let them be for the moment." Keama leaned on Monty's shoulder as he helped her into the vehicle.

Shanna handed Logan to Terra.

Thoughts of the day's events filled the long drive home. Waiting on the council could take a few days, or weeks. "What can we do while we wait? Can we begin planning, or are the dreams too much?"

Keama shifted and turned her head to Terra. "I think we must begin. We cannot wait. We must continue as if we do expect to have permission. This shows we intend to follow through as a connected community from here on out."

"We will seem like rebellious children," Monty said.

Callie stared out the window. "Yes, rebellious children looking for independence and finding their own way. We promised not to become equal to them, and we won't. We will only be equal to ourselves."

Terra laughed. The tiny triple village were becoming rebels. Somehow, that seemed appropriate, much as their ancestors would have done, and accepted. "I'm surprised Vasa wasn't there to watch."

"Oh, she was there." Shanna said. "No idea where. She expected our grandfather to turn us all down immediately. I suspect he expects us to fail as well."

"Failure will not happen. It won't happen to us," Monty said.

Chapter 25

The next few days were filled with anxious waiting. Everyone worked to prepare for their dream.

Terra studied the results of the solar power ideas. Her head hurt from the conflicting claims of each type of solar power. Pages blurred together into a mass of black lines. Even with her careful notes, she found she was sometimes looking at the same website three times without realizing it. She rubbed her forehead.

"Maja, Logan wants to go out. Let's go for a walk."

"I'll shut the computer down." Terra placed a heavy book on her notes in case a strong wind decided to blow through the open window while she was gone.

"Maybe a gentle breeze would do me good."

Mother dog joined them as they set out from the village. The walk relaxed her mind, and allowed it to refocus on why she was here, and what she really wanted from this project. Sunning lizards scurried out of their path. A coyote howled in the distance. Cactus spines littered the ground where an owl had burrowed inside.

Logan pulled away and toddled to the mother dog. She licked his face, and kept walking. How many other children in the village had she taught to walk on their own? They turned back before he tired.

Terra stayed behind Amanda Dianna, mother dog, and Logan. Amanda Dianna chatted to her brother, who had not spoken his first word.

She had lost track of the months she had been here. Logan had grown from crying, to crawling, and now walking. Life in the city wasn't missed.

They entered the busy circle where most of the village children played.

Terra stood back.

Amanda Dianna ran to Della. They played with rocks, pebbles, and small bits of firewood. Nothing like the toys of the city. If Amanda Dianna remembered them, she never asked for a city toy.

People talked inside the homes. Busy mothers watched and listened to their children outside, without worrying about them, unless it was too quiet. Monty's voice came out of Vasa's home.

Terra crept closer to hear his words. Monty was different from anyone she had ever known. He was hiding something.

Even if it meant breaking an unspoken rule, she'd listen in. Whatever he was really doing in this village, she had to know. As did Keama and Shanna.

Chapter 26

"Doesn't matter what you say. She is a friend, and friend only."

"It matters." Vasa replied coldly. "You should take them all away from here."

"If what you say is correct."

Monty's words brought back a memory long forgotten. The first woman she had lived with who wasn't her mother had told her someday she would learn secrets she needed to know.

Amanda Dianna shouted something lost in the crowd of children.

Both voices inside the home stopped as if a television turned off.

Terra crept closer to Vasa's home and slipped around the side.

Monty and Vasa stepped out to see what the children were doing.

They walked back inside.

She could no longer hear their voices. Terra waited silently for a few minutes, then walked deliberately to Vasa's door.

"Hello Vasa. I thought I would come by and see the marriage blanket you are weaving. Do you mind if I come in?"

"Hi Terra. Come in. We are glad to see you. Come on in." Vasa forced a smile.

Terra walked cautiously into the small house. It was larger than hers.

Vasa's loom took up almost one whole wall. The blanket looked about one quarter done, and the damage from the house building day had been repaired. It was pretty with reds, browns, and yellows in a unique pattern.

"It's the pattern I learned from my mom. My mom and Bea's mom are sisters, so it should be the perfect pattern."

Terra touched the loom and its contents. Each individual thread was cleverly woven into the whole. If one pulled out, it would risk the entire project.

So much like this village. So different to. We need every person. Though, everyone would understand if someone had to leave to prevent the rest of the village from falling apart.

It was too silent in the room. Terra turned.

Vasa and Monty argued with their eyes and postures.

He turned away from Vasa. "Terra, what do you know of your parents?"

Vasa opened her mouth. "Your mom."

The room swirled as her mind raced too fast through lightning clouds. At last, among the moving spots, she heard sounds. Sounds finally coalesced as people shouted her name. She grasped the sounds. Lights pulled back. She was on the floor surrounded by as many people as could fit in the tiny room.

"She needs air!" Monty picked her up and tried to make his way through the crowd to the door.

Keama hobbled up to where Monty leaned her against the house. She looked at Terra and Monty, and then turned to the crowd. "She should be fine. Go on. About your business."

As the people dispersed, Keama watched to see who went where. At last, content no one was listening too close; she sat down on a log Monty rolled over for her. "Okay what happened?"

"I merely asked if she knew her parents. Vasa thinks she should know." Monty shook his lowered head. "I can't believe what she said is true. I don't want to repeat it."

Terra looked from one to the other. Not quite clearly remembering what she had overheard.

Keama looked at her and held out her hands.

Terra reached one hand to her.

Keama clasped it firmly between her two hands.

"You are a child to me in a good way. Do you know your parents?"

The world swam.

Keama's grip held her close to reality.

"No. I never belonged anywhere. I didn't seem to have anyone who wanted me. It wasn't pretty. I try not to go there anymore."

Vasa walked up, the smirk no longer on her face. In fact, it was ashen.

"Your mother and Shanna's mother are the same. Shanna doesn't know either." Vasa stormed off, as always.

Terra turned to look up at Keama. Doubt in her eyes.

Keama merely nodded.

"Wha. Why." Terra shook her head, too many emotions running through her mind.

Keama held her hand close.

Eventually, Terra's tears stopped.

Monty held out a handkerchief to her.

The last hot tears cooled in streaks on her face.

"I always knew she had another daughter, one she refused to accept." Keama said quietly.

"She was full of shame. She wanted so much to make it out there. In that other world." Keama shook her head and looked far away as if she wanted to see deep into the past.

"I remember the night she came. It was well after midnight. She snuck in, let me see your newborn face,

and begged me to take you." Keama stared past everyone, the now laughing children not even in her sight.

"I was afraid to then. The outside law was cracking down on so many things. How could I explain a child dumped on my doorstep in the middle of the night? They would have taken you away. Who knows what would have happened then."

Keama squeezed her hand and bent to look at her closer. "I sent your mom to a friend who promised to help. She promised to keep an eye on you and let me know where you were. She did the best she could. I am glad we found you again."

Monty sat beside Terra, and looked up at Keama. "Who is Terra's father?"

"She never told me. I had my suspicions as to why. No, I won't repeat them." Keama shook her head, deep in thought.

"Monty promise me this. Treat Terra like a sister, always, never another thought. We do not know, we cannot say, we will never know, nor do we wish to know."

Monty nodded and shifted backwards. "I've seen Terra so many times on travel trips. I've always seen her as a friend. I can't imagine seeing her as anything else. I don't wish to."

Keama reached her hand out to tap Monty on the shoulder. "I think it's time you settled down. You never said, so I am guessing you are a traveling salesman, much as your father was. Please, think of yourself, and your future. Find your home soon. Among us if you wish, as we try to rebuild families."

Monty stood up, and walked purposely off, out of the circle of homes.

"Should I tell Shanna? I don't want to. It would seem. Is our mother still alive?"

Keama turned back to Terra. "I don't know. She disappeared when you were two. No one has heard from her since. Last we knew, she was headed to Las Vegas; and left you with my friend. I am sad that you were passed around so much, and lost after even she died."

A ball bounced off a wall nearby. Children played all around them as if they weren't even there.

"As for Shanna, I should tell her. I should have a long time ago. I don't know how Vasa knows, or what she knows. Maybe I should ask her first, to find out what information she has." Keama caressed her forehead.

Terra nodded. Grateful she did not have to be the one to tell Shanna. She liked Shanna. However, she didn't want to tell her she was, like Vasa, her half-sister. A shiver shot up her spine at the thought. "I could never be like her. I understand now though, why I feel at home here."

Keama laughed. "And why I was so scared to lose Amanda Dianna and Logan that I convinced Grandfather Honaw to allow the tribe as a whole to adopt them."

"So, he would be my Grandfather too?"

"No, he would be a step Grandfather, as he is the father of Shanna and Vasa's dad. Have you ever seen such a tangled web in any other village?"

"Oh far worse." Only, the webs never included me.

"And it's about to be more tangled." Monty and Callie stood in front of them. "We have decided to get married. It's time for both of us."

Callie laughed. "Now if I can stop his infatuation with Vasa and Dawna, it will all be well."

Monty laughed back. "Vasa was a decade ago, when she stayed with Bea's family for a while. If she hadn't come back here, she might have married me then. Dawna, is only a friend, she is looking for help for Della,

how can I refuse to help, and be a father figure for the child?"

Terra rubbed her forehead. A tangled web. Much as the one they had mentioned to Grandfather Honaw. And families who had disappeared and made more webby connections would soon return.

Chapter 27

Logan toddled into the tiny circle with Shanna.

The four of them looked at one another.

It was like seeing Shanna for the first time.

"Mother dog brought Logan to my house. I couldn't figure out why."

Terra tried to sit up straighter. "I thought Amanda Dianna was watching him. Is she still playing?"

"She and Della are showing a couple of other young children how to do sand drawings. Della is quite good actually." Shanna said.

The silence built. No one was ready to break the news to Shanna, here, in the open.

Shanna wrinkled her brow in the confused silence. "Anyway, a call came in from Grandfather Honaw. We can go tomorrow if everyone is ready."

"I think that would be fine. Shanna, can you help me up, and back to my home? Monty, you and Callie let us know after tomorrow your plans, we have much to do for tomorrow."

Shanna helped Keama to her feet.

The village elder touched Terra's hand. "Play with Amanda Dianna a few minutes. Bring both of the children along to my home."

Terra nodded. Words couldn't sneak around the lump in her throat.

The group separated, all knowing what those next few minutes would mean, and unsure what the outcome might mean to them, individually, and as a village.

Terra held Logan's hand.

He toddled to his sister, unaware of his role in the day's events.

Sand drawings surrounded Amanda Dianna and Della. Most of the drawings were within circular "frames" of sand, twigs, or pebbles. Each drawing was signed by the creator. Some still under construction. Della had enough talent to follow in her mother's footsteps.

"We are going to Keama's in a few minutes. Your drawing is pretty. Can you explain it to me?" She squatted down beside Amanda Dianna.

"I have my birth mom and dad here, in the sun's rays. They visit every day, to bring smiles to our faces. Here in the center is you; holding each of our hands. On the right is a mountain, with trees and grass. On the left, is ocean, moving always. Under our feet is the desert. We reach out to embrace it all, and leave no one behind."

A tear trickled down her cheek. She held out her hand to the young girl. Tears unsteadied her voice. "How perfect. You can finish it later. We need to go now."

Amanda Dianna grabbed her hand and walked away from the crowd of children. She yelled goodbyes. The windows at Keama's home were shut. Amanda Dianna ran to knock on the door.

Terra stood back. How would Shanna feel now, knowing they were half-sisters? Had Keama told her the rest? She was about to turn and leave, when the door finally creaked slowly open.

Keama motioned them in, and then shut the door quickly behind them.

Shanna sat on Keama's bed staring down at her hands.

Terra stood against the door. The room seemed too small for five people. She could barely breathe.

Shanna glanced up at her.

Logan finally broke the silence by pulling Terra to Shanna.

Terra collapsed into tears again beside Shanna. They subsided sooner this time, leaving her feeling hot and dry. "I could never be like Vasa," she said.

Shanna reached out to Terra, slowly at first. "I know. I wonder where she is? What happened to her?"

Keama sat beside Shanna. "Vasa may know. We have to ask her."

Shanna and Terra stared at her.

"She would never tell us. Maybe Bea's family knows."

Keama shook her head as she reached out an arm to each of them. "If she had found them, we would know. Bea would have known her. No, I fear she met the ugly side of what happens to so many girls and young women who leave the reservations to seek their fortunes. I can only hope she is still alive and safe, somewhere."

"Maybe Callie can find her?" Terra said.

"We can see. Now, we need to prepare for tomorrow. Are you both ready?" Keama asked.

"I think so." Shanna moved as if to rise.

"I hope so. There isn't much we have to do. It depends on Grandfather Honaw's decision."

If Vasa had gone directly there, it could change before morning.

The same fear glistened in Shanna's eyes.

Keama leaned back. "That and hopefully have all the answers to any questions they might ask."

"Keama, does this mean Maja can really adopt us now?"

Laughter broke out. It felt good to smile again.

"We have to finish this other business first. A few final pieces of paperwork must be stamped. Once upon a time, it would now be over. Not today. It must be drawn out longer than necessary."

Terra held out her arms to draw Amanda Dianna near. "Yes. The things that should be finished quickly must move at less than a snail's pace. While the things that don't matter when, or if, they are completed must be done instantaneously."

The girl laughed. "That sounds backwards."

"Of course." And the outside world would remain that way. If she stayed here now, she could leave it behind forever. A part of her, her past, would live in that backwards world.

"Tomorrow comes quickly. Shanna, could you watch the children for an hour while I try to collect some things? I promise I won't drive you too crazy with requests now that I know you are my sister."

"How about Keama and I both come to your house and help you, and even prepare dinner for us all. I'll even go find Callie."

Terra laughed. Laughing really felt good now, especially with a sister she could treasure to share it with. "If you can drag her away from Monty."

I promise to myself, I'll be a far better sister that Vasa is for Shanna. She deserves the best sister in the world.

Chapter 28

The group gathered in the predawn for the van ride to the council meeting. A chill permeated the late spring air. Lizard rocks were bare. A cat settled into a nap beside Keama's steps.

Even though there had been some noticeable tension at first, the evening before had turned into a laughter and fun fest. Shanna had been pleasant as always, and asked few questions about Terra's childhood. Those would come someday. Unless she told her she didn't want to talk about it. Something held her back from saying so.

Today, however, the butterflies were back with a vengeance. She skipped breakfast to try to calm them. Even corn bread was too heavy. Thinking about food, or the meeting, made her stomach do flip flops. There was too much she needed to know. Terra had written every note that would be helpful.

The long ride was silent. Shanna didn't even turn the radio on. As she parked the van, the sun was barely slipping over the horizon.

Terra dreaded that walk through the watchful village, and then entering that darkened meeting chamber. A place that sunshine seemed to have never touched.

Terra helped Keama down from the van and looked around. It was silent. No one to watch them today. No sounds during the long walk past the apparently empty houses to the council meeting.

Shanna opened the door, and a cold breeze blew out, rather than the warmth one would expect if a fire were built and waiting for them.

Everyone else filed in before her.

No light peeked through the door. Finally, her eyes adjusted to the candle at one end of the room. Three

people sat around the candle. Those people seemed not to move, or acknowledge them.

Eyes not adjusted enough to make out faces at the end of the table, Terra waited, as did every other person in the room.

After a long time, Shanna stumbled out some words. "Grandfather Honaw we have come. Did we come at a good time?"

His head lifted to look at the assembled group. The flames of the single candle caused his eyes to sparkle. He looked around the room slowly at each person. His eyes settled at last on Terra.

They pierced through to her soul.

Holding that look, he spoke at last. "The time is always good. First, we must clear up a few things before we begin the council meeting. Della, Amanda Dianna, please take Logan. Go outside the door, and wait until you are called."

Terra could not imagine letting any of the children go out into that lonely, desolate place. She held Logan tight to her.

Amanda Dianna held Della's hand. "Please Grandfather Honaw, we need to be kept aware of what is going on. We promise to be quiet, and will take Logan out if he cries."

Grandfather Honaw nodded to her. "What you are about to hear is not nice for young ears. Your mothers may not wish you to hear it."

Amanda Dianna shook her head. "Better to hear the whole story now, than half the story later, and fear the part we didn't hear."

Grandfather Honaw nodded at her again. "You are brave and wise. If Terra and Keama agree, we may begin."

Terra and Keama nodded.

"My other granddaughter has brought me a sordid tale that will not be repeated before the council. She asserts its truth. I need to know, is it true?"

The group looked at each other, and the two people Terra did not know.

"Which story is this Grandfather? I should have come to rest my troubles at your door. By the time I found out a story yesterday evening, there was no time," Shanna said.

Grandfather Honaw looked into each face.

Each person tried to be still as he watched them.

At last, his eyes rested on Terra again.

"Is it now believed that this child of the world may belong to our village through one, and most likely two connections?"

"Grandfather Honaw, I have reason to believe that this is the lost daughter of your daughter-in-law. Regardless of legal or biological status, I firmly believe she belongs here, in her heart, and soul." Keama's words were slow and deliberate.

"My granddaughter Vasa does not believe she belongs. She feels she herself does not belong to the village. I have suggested she plan a vacation away, visiting her cousin's family."

A barely audible sound resounded through the room.

"I will now ask that the council members enter, and the traditional fires be lit." He raised his hand to the two next to him.

Terra barely breathed as she awaited his reply. Her response, or lack thereof could affect the council meeting. There was nothing she had to add about the story of who she was by birth. If it were true, her place among the

village could not be denied, unless she broke a major taboo.

Council members filed in, and silently took their places.

One person rebuilt the council fire from the ashes and embers.

Grandfather Honaw spoke again. "As the main village, we do keep watch over our sister villages. However, sometimes it is time for our sisters to find their other half, and move on. Perhaps they have. Even though this time it is by looking deep within themselves to see people and ideas they never expected to see or know."

During the short pause, Grandfather Honaw looked around the room to verify everyone was listening. "At this time, this small cluster of villages will begin an experiment with our consent. They will develop their own sister village in order to complete the process. They will bring modern thoughts to their villages, and theirs alone, during this process. We will remain as we are, no modern tools going out, none coming in."

Everyone nodded in agreement.

Terra finally took a deep breath.

Grandfather Honaw, and every member of the council stared right at her.

Heat rose in her face.

"This newcomer, Terra will be accepted as a full-fledged member of her village with all rights and responsibilities accorded. Does anyone object?"

Not a sound was heard, from either outside, or inside. Two shadows floated over the fireplace.

Grandfather Honaw spoke solemnly. "The time has come to think of the futures of the two little ones." He turned to Amanda Dianna.

She breathed deeply and grasped Terra's hand.

Then Grandfather Honaw looked back at Terra. "I think they have chosen their mother well. If these children are to be fully adopted by her, several things must happen first. Terra, you must show you complete what you begin by bringing jobs, and hope to your village. You must help your community, split in two, be woven back into a whole. You must learn our ways and hold them dear."

Terra struggled to find her voice. "Yes, Grandfather, I will."

The fire flicked, outlining a slight smile on his face. "You have begun well, and I have no doubt you will succeed with the help of your friends. As long as your unintentional enemies are out of the way."

The tiny laugh floated around the room.

"Thank you Grandfather Honaw. May I ask a question?"

All eyes turned to her. Her friends watchful. The council curious.

Grandfather Honaw nodded his head in her direction.

"Grandfather Honaw, will outsiders be allowed to visit our village, and our sister village to be determined, and assist us in learning what we need to know? They may have to visit for a few weeks in order to teach us to use these technologies, while ancient in origin, they hold the current secrets to." Her words echoed a tumbled brook of meanings.

"They may come to teach. Not to stay. If any, such as yourself," with a nod to Terra, "wish to consider making this their home, there will be a lengthy appeals process that will begin, and end, here."

Terra nodded in agreement and understanding. "Thank you Grandfather Honaw. When may we begin?"

Grandfather Honaw laughed. "I am sure you already have. You may go. You have much work to do."

Shanna opened the door.

A rush of warm desert air swept into the room, reminding everyone that much of the day had already passed. The group stepped quietly and lightly, out into the sunshine to begin their new adventure.

Chapter 29

The group of villagers and children mixed their third set of bricks. Terra rested for a moment while she listened to the banter around her.

"There will be plenty of bricks after this."

"We can start looking at the foundation today."

"Bea, Bran, exactly where do you want the foundation to be?"

Bran filled his brick mold. "Both circles are full. We don't want to be the only ones by ourselves."

Callie covered her mouth with a muddy hand.

"An idea will come soon." Terra tapped her mold.

The villagers looked at her. All the chatter had ceased as the people stared. Self-conscious, she ducked her head. Maybe Callie hadn't told anyone, and they thought Terra wanted a bigger house.

A shadow appeared at her feet. She followed that shadow back to three men with their arms across chests, watching the group silently.

Bran stood up. "Hello, how are you?"

The men nodded in unison. The one in front stepped one step forward. "Grandfather Honaw sent us. You will need double this many bricks. We will help you plan the foundations today. We will show you a way to hasten the drying process using glass panels for the latest batches of bricks."

With that, he turned and walked toward the village followed by the other two men.

Bran and Bea quickly followed them.

Terra dropped Logan off with Keama and followed.

They stopped at a point halfway between the two current circles. "Here. You will form one side as a link

between the circles. The other house will be built directly across from you forming a second link."

The two men set to work making measurements, and determining how level the ground already was. Satisfied, the spokesman turned to Bran and Bea. "Your cellar will be prepared this next week. Both houses will be built at the same time to cement the joining of the village."

All three men stalked off in the direction of the council village.

The rest of the group slowly trooped over, still dripping mud.

Bea and Bran held each other close, staring at the ground that was to be their home.

With the council village men gone, the group talked and laughed again, though noticeably less loud than before. Vasa's husband and son both seemed happier than usual, laughing and joking easily with the group. Neither Vasa, nor Monty, had been seen for a few days.

A few days later, the council village men drove a truck past Terra while she was at the wading tree.

She followed the truck up the hill.

In minutes, the men set up a miniature greenhouse of glass panels over the bricks to speed the drying process.

Terra hid when they came back past her at the spring. She walked back to look at the constructions. Similar to a few of the solar panels she had looked at. Maybe they weren't as set in their ways as they wanted people to think.

The men parked at the spot for the new houses and spent the afternoon digging the cellars. Several people stopped by and offered to help. However, the two men said that others would only be in the way in the tiny holes. They did drink water, whenever offered. By nightfall, both cellars were prepared, and the men gone.

Chapter 30

A few days later, Terra prepared her notes on the solar panel test results. None of the companies had bothered to try the different technologies here in this desert region. These notes were only a guideline. Some local valleys, and areas further out had microclimates of their own, which may, or may not, hold out to her current observations.

Her favorite, the solar paint, was in production and not intended for use. Perhaps as a journalist, the company would allow her, and the tribe, to test and market the products for them.

A shadow flitted across the side of the house.

"It's all set. We can have the town." Monty appeared.

Terra shook her head in disbelief. "Why did you do it? You didn't even ask. Where did you find that kind of money?"

He laughed. "My father, like me, was a salesman. The money has to go somewhere. Anyway, I promised Keama to settle down and marry Callie. There is still plenty. It will be a good staging ground for the factories and transporting of the goods we can't have here."

Terra sat down on the nearby tree stump bench. "This is what you want? I barely know you. I have trouble believing it."

He smiled as he looked past her to the solar panel project. "I want my family happy. Everyone here is all I have left. My last chance at family. I can't say I will succeed. Though I will try. How is your project?"

The wall chronicled her hard won results. "There are several types of solar power in current production. One, an on-grid type, where you sell extra power to the electric company during the day, and buy some back at night."

She pointed to one set of brochures, and one of the panels on the wall.

"There is the off-grid version, which looks basically the same. With twice as many panels, and batteries to store the power for night use." This was her least favorite, if most independent choice.

"And then this virtually untested type in the paint itself." The paint on the doorframe didn't appear to be doing anything. No visible warmth, like the panels gave.

The numbers told the true tales. On-grid required the fewest panels, and showed the most cost savings for the average owner. However, in the event of a power outage, it was useless if the sun didn't shine regularly. It might be good in a sunny place like here; though powerless at night.

The off-grid system required a great outlay upfront, plus upkeep in batteries, whose risk, cost, and replacement rate was based on many factors, including the amount of battery use. They would be useful in a power outage, though extremely expensive in the initial outlay and upkeep.

The solar panel paint did not seem to cure either of these ills, except to take up less space on the building. It could be painted on the whole building, adding virtually no weight. The set up price was still high, and weathering issues were unknown. The paint would be a trial in progress.

Looking at all the costs and complexities, she could not decide what to do for her village. Nothing seemed enough the correct answer. Without it, she wouldn't meet her obligations. It was an overwhelming situation, and she knew she needed an answer soon.

"Let me see your stats." Monty held out his hand. He had sat down beside her.

She handed them to him. Failure stared her in the face. Even he expected more.

Her home here, her children, everything she had, could be lost if she could not find the answers she needed to bring the village together. She had to find a way to make the solar energy sustainable, in order to promote jobs.

Tears snuck out and flowed down her cheeks. "I could always go back to traveling and writing."

She took a deep breath. "I don't want to." Terra raised her hands to her eyes and turned away.

Monty touched her shoulder, and looked at the pages. "It can be done. I think. I've helped Callie find the missing members, most of them anyway. Not only do you have a salesman to help you, you have all kinds of business people. We can do it. The costs appear astronomical to you. For a business venture, they aren't so bad."

Her tears stopped.

"The way business works isn't easy. We obtain the loan, then we have to build the place to make the solar panels. We can even have more than one type if we wish. We have to give away a few samples to test, easy to do in our own village, and then we sell new models to other people to re-coup our costs."

"It would take years. I don't have that long. Neither do Amanda Dianna and Logan."

Monty laughed and gave her a quick hug. "Grandfather Honaw doesn't expect it to happen overnight. Merely creating the set up, and I think the two weddings will make him happy. Now, let's go see Callie."

Amanda Dianna and Logan played behind the house. As she squatted down beside them to help Logan up, her phone rang.

Monty walked on ahead of her and left her with the children.

It was Janet, whom she had nearly forgotten. "Hello Janet, how are you?"

"Hi Terra, I'll be coming to visit soon. Can't talk now, much to do. Your project, and my own, are keeping me busy. See you soon." The connection clicked off.

Terra shook her head. She helped the children up and walked towards Keama's house. Her mind swirled as she walked back through the village to Callie's. Vasa's voice rang out of her home for the first time in weeks. The words weren't clear, so she kept on going.

Callie and Dawna lived in the same house, sharing expenses, as there had not been enough homes in the village when she came back from college. Della was outside, drawing in the sand.

Today's drawing was two long chains, each with a broken link on the end. At the opposite ends, one had what looked like a stake holding it to the ground, while the other appeared to be resting in the clouds. Those links appeared to move like snakeheads, searching for each other to become a whole chain link again, linking Sky and Earth.

Voices spoke inside.

"Hello, is Monty here?" Terra approached the open door.

"Yes, I'm here. Come on in."

Monty and Callie were at the computer going over notes and information.

Dawna sorted through piles of paperwork.

"I think we have it. With Monty buying the town, we can do so much more. Our city cousins can live there if they want. Some can run regular businesses, while others will help with the online university and the solar panel making and distributing." Dawna looked up, and stopped abruptly with her mouth open.

At the door a woman in traditional dress stood, waiting patiently. She did not say a word. The woman sat a covered basket on the floor, turned, and left. She walked back towards the council village.

Terra picked up the heavy basket. She lifted it to the table and drew back the colorful cloth to reveal several booklets and a letter addressed to her.

Her hands shook as she opened the letter.

"Dear Granddaughter Terra,

Your quest has intrigued me. Even though I am against it for my people, my Grandson Monty has convinced me that something close to truth should be out there, or people will make up lies and half-truths of their own. Take these stories. They were written down without our permission at one time and published.

While not completely accurate, they are more factual than the lies I fear may be told about us if we don't allow something to be shared. As these already exist out there for others to find, you may use these copies, and these copies only in your online university.

Sorry, there will be no contact person for people to learn more from.

Grandfather Honaw"

Terra handed the booklets to Monty and Callie. "I guess we are supposed to pretend he didn't send the letter."

Callie's eyes gleamed as she flipped through them. "I can build their pages; it would be an honor."

"How are you coming along with your plans Callie?"

Callie dropped the booklets to her lap and stared far out the door. "Oh, wonderfully well. I have contacted so many people who want to be part of this. I have a web hosting plan in place. Every group gets their own set of

pages. Some of our villagers will help me moderate it. I'm overwhelmed with the response."

She looked up at Monty. "And of course the wedding plans as well."

Dawna sorted through a box of papers. "My travel agency plan is working great. So many young journalists are ready to travel to the different tribes, all over the world to do what you did. They'll share the lives and stories of those who cannot themselves."

"What exactly do you mean?" Terra stammered.

Everyone laughed.

"So many people want to follow in your footsteps and actually live their lives there, even if only for a short time. This time though, they are purposely taking technology with them. If anyone in the village is willing, they can learn to build and maintain their own part of the website."

"That would be great. It's usually the younger generation who have such interests." Several villages she had visited would have preteens ready to take on such a task.

"That is where we need you most Terra. Most of these places have no electricity. We need that factory built. And solar panels ready to send with these travelers. Without them, the distant tribes will not be able to build and maintain these websites, and then the university will be slow to start." Callie's eyes lit up.

"It will take so much time, so much money."

"Where do you think I have been? There is funding, lots of it. We have funding from several dozen different places. Places that want the records, the arts, the stories preserved. The funding will pay for the solar panels for electricity, for the factory to build them, to send the people to the distant places. It's all set. We need you to decide what is the best type of panel."

Terra didn't quite trust him. She didn't doubt him. As a travel writer, finding those special funding projects had been difficult, until those funders started coming to her. No one type of solar panel would be perfect for all the places she had been. Nor for all the places she hadn't been. She would have to choose the most portable, most likely to survive travel, and all kinds of weather conditions.

Chapter 31

Amanda Dianna played with the other children. She blended in so well here, and all it would take was one cog thrown into the wheel to break the community. Terra could lose her chance to keep these children she never expected to have. She had grown to cherish them to the point she could not imagine life without them by her side.

The days quickly flew into weeks as the new sister town began to take shape. Funders arrived and wanted to be shown where everything would be housed in the new town. Where, and how the factory and loading docks would be built, the stores, homes, and even a school had to be planned.

Some of the missing family members migrated to the new town, ready to find a place to build their new businesses, and renovate the hotel for the local office building. It would make a great central location to house all the office workers for the various companies, as well as a library for storage use by the online college.

Meanwhile, an old elementary school would be redesigned into the new solar panel factory, leaving the old high school to be redeveloped into a small school for all ages.

At last, the planning stages were done. Anticipation danced in the air. The tiny village waited patiently as always. People watched the horizon waiting on the busloads of people waiting to visit family that had been forgotten. Nerves frayed. Parents told children to be quiet, and don't play in the dirt.

Terra was visiting with Keama when the first bus pulled up outside her home. She and Keama stepped out to see who were the first to arrive.

Amanda Dianna stood close beside them.

The group filed off the bus slowly and nosily. They looked around the tiny village, trying to find a large meeting building with chairs to sit. There was no building large enough to house them all, and certainly no air conditioning. The long lost family members huddled together like so many cattle, unsure what to do.

The last person stepped down the bus steps. She looked around carefully, searching.

"Terra? Where are you?"

"Janet, I'm here. It's so good to see you." Terra walked forward towards her. "I am surprised you came."

Janet reached out to hug her. "I couldn't stay away. I will stay in the new town. We can visit. Where can we take this group of people?"

The group stared at her, as if she held the answers. "How about the hill where we built the bricks."

She led this noisy bunch through the silent village. The crowd filed behind her through the two circles of houses up the path, past the wading tree, and into the clearing where the greenhouse still covered the baking bricks.

Terra reached the high point, and turned to look behind her. The group from the bus waited patiently. All three villages had followed behind them. So far, she did not see any happy, or sad, reunions. There was no sign of Bea, Monty, or Vasa.

Keama walked up the hill slowly.

Logan tried to drag her along.

The village elder turned to face the crowd.

Rays of sunshine peeked through the few clouds in the sky.

Keama watched the group a moment. "Please visit among yourselves. Sit if you like. The next bus will be here in a few minutes. Then we will begin this meeting."

The crowd moved, like oil and vinegar, trying not to mix too much. It seemed most of this group were a younger generation. People who had never been to the village of their parents, and did not know their relatives here at all.

A few people walked their direction from the council village. At a distance, faces were indiscernible.

Vasa led the second bus load of people toward the meeting place.

The people from the council village arrived first, and sat quietly within listening distance, though not close enough for Terra to determine who they were.

The group from the second bus was slower. As they reached the crowd, they passed like a spoon into the oil and vinegar mixture and stirred the whole group up. Soon, everyone was in the midst of noisy reunions. Bea stood surrounded by a dozen people of all ages.

Keama stood silently beside Terra. At last, she raised her hands.

The crowd slowly turned to look at her.

Terra stepped back to join the crowd, watching the scene unfold around her like a dream.

"My village, my family, I am glad you have all come home. I see most everyone who can, came home. I know some of you. Many of you will choose to live in the new town that my grandson has so helpfully found for you all. You have already seen this town, as you met there. It will soon be bustling as the main center for the solar panel factory, the second office for the travel center, and the call center for the online university."

Keama looked around the crowd as she talked, her eyes alone shushing a crying baby. "Hopefully, you will all stay. There will be employment. Plenty to rebuild this community to make it sustainable within the rules and roles provided by our governing council village."

Keama looked toward the people who had come from the council village.

One among them stood and walked to the hilltop.

Grandfather Honaw waded through the stream of hushed voices.

He turned to speak to the crowd gathered before him. "My grandchildren have planned well. Please, follow the simple rules and give them hope. I will be watching, not impeding unless I believe I, and my village, are at risk." He looked around the whole group, as they stood silently. Then, he walked back to his friends from the council village. They were like a mirage in the desert.

The now silent mixture of villages and city dwellers watched them walk away.

Keama waited. "Today, let us begin rebuilding. We have two new homes ready to be built. Monty and Bran will lead you to the foundations and bring carts for the bricks. The children will be in charge of water today." She dropped her hands to her sides, dismissing the group as a whole.

The group split into three groups. Children scampered to the creek. Women walked to the brick piles. Men hurried toward the foundation areas. So far, it was peaceful. Would it last? Could a village with so deep a divide completely heal their wounds and rebuild together that which had been torn apart

Chapter 32

The morning progressed. Two houses rose slowly from their foundations. Early on, when people talked face to face, there was much to be said. As time progressed, the heat rose, and the walls were at face level. Tension flared with the heat and sunburn. Tiny arguments sprung up as people accidentally bumped others in the face, or arm, with bricks.

"It isn't true!" Vasa shouted and stormed off toward her own home.

All talking and arguing stopped. People stared.

Vasa's husband and Monty appeared to be arguing over the last brick in the cart they had.

Monty stepped back. "I'm not here to be in the middle. Vasa and I are old friends, nothing more."

Vasa's husband raised his head and laughed. "Old lovers yes. Friends, maybe not so much."

Monty looked at him again. "No really, she is a good friend now. Nothing more."

Vasa's husband glared at him. "It doesn't matter." He sighed deeply.

"If she's not with you; it's always someone. I'd rather she stayed in the village." He took the brick and slowly raised it into place on the top of the wall of Monty's future home.

Keama stepped up to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

His shoulders heaved with emotion.

The brick fell to the ground.

She turned to the watching crowd. "Terra, Amanda Dianna, come. The rest of you go to the creek for lunch."

The home builders turned quietly to go.

Monty stepped up to her. He opened his mouth as if to speak.

"Grandson, you need to go to Callie. You have done enough for the moment." Keama turned back to the distraught man.

When everyone else was out of range, he spoke with a thick voice. "She never wanted to stay here. I made her."

Keama held his shoulder so he couldn't turn away. Her eyes were thick as well. "If she had gone, you would never have known your son. She would have disappeared like so many before her. You gave her a home and never questioned her indiscretions. Your son is better off, and so are you, though it has been difficult. If she chooses to leave now, she may not go far, if anyone would have her. Now though, there would be opportunities for her as a single woman. Not like a generation ago, or even a decade ago. Would you really want her to leave?"

He looked up to Keama as he thought for a moment. "Not really. I didn't mind Falead so much. I don't like thinking of her with Monty."

Keama smiled. "I think Monty will be busy himself for a while. They are both wild souls and can't settle. There must be a reason we don't see. Give them some time. Today is not the day."

She looked down at the brick on the ground. "The brick is still whole. There is still hope."

Callie, Monty, and Vasa stood behind them. Tears streamed down Vasa's face.

Callie stared, showing no emotion.

"The four of you, put this last brick together on this top row. May it be a reminder." Keama stepped back to watch them work together.

They wedged the brick into place. Vasa then took her husband's hand, and they wondered off alone.

Monty turned to talk quietly with Keama.

Callie walked over to Terra. "I don't think he has been with her since Monty decided to marry me. I know I can't tame him. Nothing can. Nor her. I can't marry the one I love. So I marry the one I can."

She walked back toward the creek.

Amanda Dianna squeezed her hand.

Terra let out a deep breath, glad that was over. They walked back toward the crowd themselves.

Chapter 33

Bea was surrounded by her family, with Bran at her side. Her face glowed as she told stories to her nieces and nephews.

Terra kept Amanda Dianna and Logan close by her side the rest of day, watching everyone as they worked to finish the houses by sunset.

In the early afternoon the village women went to their homes to prepare the evening meal.

Several men arrived from the council village to help the men finish the two roofs.

Every noise, every outburst made Terra jump. At one point, someone screamed. She grabbed Amanda Dianna and Logan, and wouldn't let go.

Callie laughed. "Momma Dog ran under one of the city women, Bea's sister, I think."

Finally, the two houses were done, and the group gathered within the new circle for the evening meal.

Terra watched nervously, fearing that at any minute, something could happen to take these two children from her.

Everyone prepared to eat.

Keama stood up to address the crowd. "Thank you everyone for your hard work today. We now have two beautiful new homes to be occupied by the two happy couples of this village. Let them come forth."

Bea came out in her beaded dress, all prepared for the festivities. Her family stood close behind her, tears beaming in their eyes as well as hers. Bran stood by her side.

Monty and Callie arrived, dressed in nice clothes, nothing fancy.

Keama looked over the crowd, waiting it seemed.

"Amanda Dianna, please come and watch the ceremony."

Amanda Dianna walked cautiously forward to stand beside Keama.

Keama raised her hands to begin.

Grandfather Honaw stood nearby surrounded by his group from the council village. He nodded to Keama and she continued.

"As these two couples join tonight, so has this village joined to create their homes, as well as new lives for the rest of us. May their happiness, their homes, and our community survive intact together throughout all of our lives, and the unborn. May these two couples bring forth a new generation, able to keep the old ways, and able to bring them into the new life we all begin today."

Keama lowered her hands, and though exhausted, walked forward to embrace both couples.

Villagers, and city cousins brought their gifts for the two couples. Some small, some large, to fill up the two new homes.

Amanda Dianna ran to watch Bea admire the rugs, mats, and pots she was given. All the children's memento bricks were in the walls of her new home.

Monty and Callie weren't left out. Few had found time to make gifts for them. Most of their gifts were recycled, or bought gifts, both signifying more about the receivers than the givers.

At last, everyone settled down and walked towards the tables laden with food. The children went first and were seated.

Grandfather Honaw raised his arms.

Everyone quickly quieted.

Terra held Amanda Dianna and Logan close to her.

"Congratulations to everyone. I have seen what this young daughter village has been able to accomplish. May both halves begin to mesh and meld together."

He looked around the group for specific people. "With Granddaughter Callie and Grandson Monty at the helm, the Online University has begun, and from all reports appears to be running well. May it continue, with all of you working together."

He searched around the circle of faces again. "May Granddaughter Dawna have good luck with her travel agency. It is vital to the development and ongoing work of the Online University."

Grandfather Honaw searched the crowd again.

A hand on Terra's shoulder turned out to be Janet beside her. She tried to smile at her. Her hands and face shook.

Grandfather Honaw and Keama stood side by side.

"Granddaughter Terra, please come forward."

Terra gulped hard, and walked slowly forward. She held Amanda Diana and Logan's hands.

Janet stayed by her side.

Grandfather Honaw spoke as the crowd parted to allow her through. "Keama made an unusual choice to adopt these two children by the whole tribe until their new mother could be found."

Terra held the children closer and continued her slow walk forward.

"She found many who did not live up to expectations. She did not want to lose these two precious gems." His eyes sparkled.

"At last she found this woman, Terra, a writer who lived among many ancient tribes to come and be a Storysaver for our daughter village."

By this time, Terra and the children were in front of him. Her arms shook as she stood close and listened.

"It turns out, her mother is from our villages, though we have not known for a generation or more where she is." He turned to Terra.

"Granddaughter Terra, you belong to this village, you have shown your value by bringing this community together. As council village, we have agreed that you, and you alone, should adopt these two children as your own."

Tears flowed down her cheeks.

Janet stood firmly beside her.

Mother dog leaned against Logan.

Terra squatted down on the ground to hold her children closer.

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Thanks!

Abby Brown

About the Author

Abby Brown began reading at far too young an age. Her preferred reading material was nonfiction, with biographies and science being at the forefront of her library excursions.

Her ability to memorize and use all the grammar rules in school years led to working in the school library while classmates caught up. All of those rules, and diagramming sentences was easy and relaxing. For many years. All forgotten now. Except the joyful memories of preparing the library for others to use.

As an adult, gardening, and preparing the garden bounty, was her way to relax. To think. To make (tasty) order out chaos. Even that is gone now. May you enjoy the recipes she has gathered over the decades.

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Some secrets her family thought she knew.

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NonFiction

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